THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

THE BRITISH ESSAY

EDITED BY
DENISE GIGANTE
AND JASON CHILDS

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From ancient influences on the essay to the Irish essay as performance, from British imperial propaganda to African postcolonial resistance, from political pamphlets to the rise of literary professionalism, and from gastronomy to ecocriticism, *The Cambridge History of the British Essay* offers the first authoritative single-volume history of the essay's development within British literary tradition. Its fifty contributors come from widely diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise to show how, as the form morphs to serve new contexts and concerns, it remains a vital genre of literary 'attempt' in such fields as journalism, academic and cultural critique, life writing, and digital essayism.

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Preface to a History in the Manner of an Essay

DENISE GIGANTE

Let's begin with a proposition. *The Cambridge History of the British Essay*, in forty-seven substantive and original chapters, provides the first major history of the essay form in English. It deploys both wide-angle and telescopic lenses to survey that history, from the deep roots of the essay in classical tradition through its proliferation in today's digital media.[1] While there are forms of Anglo-American essayism relevant to that prolonged history, it is worth noting that a separate volume in the Cambridge History series, published contemporaneously with this one, is dedicated to the essay in an American context.[2] Of course, since we are living in an era of global connectivity (if not connection), such distinctions may seem irrelevant. Yet over the past six centuries, a tradition of the British essay has evolved in reviewing, travel writing, history, biography, political theory, spiritual autobiography, and many other modalities inherent to the essay that extended its reach as a flexible and multivalent form long before the emergence of the Internet.

That tradition includes colonial and postcolonial manifestations of the essay that deserve attention, both as extensions of the British imperial enterprise and as internal forms of subversion and resistance to it.[3] The familiar voices of Francis Bacon, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, Virginia Woolf, and other canonical staples are resituated here in the context of other voices that have long gone missing. Such voices emerge in

[1] On the former, see H. Power, 'Ancient influences on the essay' (Ch. 1) and on the latter, J. Pugh, 'Blogging in Britain: essays in the digital age' (Ch. 46).

[2] On the American connection, see P. Coleman, 'Transatlantic essayism' (Ch. 38), and on the educational legacies of the essay in the United States, J. Klancher, 'The academic essay: rhetoric and pedagogy' (Ch. 21). *The Cambridge History of the American Essay* is edited by Christy Wampole and Jason Childs.

[3] Priti Joshi makes this argument with respect to the English-language essay in India in Ch. 31, 'Grist for the mill: history and the essay in India, 1870–1920', as does Jeanne-Marie Jackson in Ch. 32, 'The African Gold Coast essay: straddling fact and prophecy'.

the angry rhetoric of pamphlets by women essayists in the early modern period, in the resolves and sermons of seventeenth-century divines, in the school themes that have been all too quickly crumpled up and buried in time, in the newspaper columns of Chartists and radicals striving for political reform, in the publications of the New Woman, in the periodical networks of African Gold Coast intellectuals, in the creative non-fiction of postcolonial subjects, in the memoirs of Irish Traveller people, and in essayistic responses to geopolitical crises and the spectre of ecological apocalypse.[4] Our purpose in this preface is to give a few pointers, not a detailed map of what is, after all, quite a hefty volume. A map of sorts is provided in the two appendices of essayists mentioned in this volume, the first alphabetical and the second chronological. But if its name is any indication, the essay lives and breathes through exploration.

While not exactly a 'preface essay' as Mario Aquilina defines it in Chapter 29 of this volume, our preface does have essayistic aspirations to remain brief and conversable, despite the larger arsenal of rhetorical, didactic, scholarly, analytical, polemical, and even propagandist strategies available to the essayist, as one finds elaborated in the chapters of this volume.[5] What we would like to stress above all is the *associative* nature of the essay. Such association may operate as an internal structuring mechanism, as in the form of the literary essay derived from Montaigne, but it is likewise a generic feature linking the essay to other literary forms. Among those elaborated in this volume are the associations the essay has with the novel, the commonplace book, the miscellany, the school theme, the preface, the review, the newspaper leader, the letter, the diary, the political tract, the conduct manual, the travel journal, the philosophical treatise, the reverie, the gastronomical effusion, the verse essay, the memoir, the blog, and the cine-essay.[6]

[4] See, respectively, M. Emre, 'Anger, rhetoric, and early women essayists (Ch. 6); K. Murphy, 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' (Ch. 2); N. Reisner, 'The sermon and the essay' (Ch. 5); T. Karshan, 'The essay and the theme' (Ch. 20); G. Vargo, 'The essay in the age of Chartism' (Ch. 26); R. Rainof, 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' (Ch. 34); Jackson, 'The African Gold Coast essay: straddling fact and prophecy'; S. Majumdar, 'After empire: postcolonialism and the essay' (Ch. 41); P. Reynolds, 'Performance and the Irish essay' (Ch. 42); R. Kerridge, 'The essay, ecocriticism, and the Anthropocene' (Ch. 47); and B. Schaff, 'A brief history of travel and the essay' (Ch. 30).

[5] M. Aquilina, 'The preface essay' (Ch. 29).

[6] See, following the sequence above, J. Davidson, 'The essay and the rise of the novel' (Ch. 13); A. Vine, 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' (Ch. 3); Karshan, 'The essay and the theme'; Aquilina, 'The preface essay'; R. Morrison, 'Nineteenth-century reviews reviewed' (Ch. 24); J. Shattock, 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' (Ch. 25); E.T. Bannet, 'Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays' (Ch. 8); A.B. Bricker and M. Nicosia, 'The polemical essay in pamphlets, newsbooks, and periodicals'

The essay may present itself in the shape of verse under the title of an essay, or it may pass by other names in the form of a de facto essay. It may be plucked from a longer text and collected in a book of essays, or it may appear serially in the more ephemeral form of a periodical. It may adopt a tone that is vituperative and satiric, or comforting in avuncular wisdom. Its voice may be strident in the face of injustice, or soporific (at times) in high seriousness. It may appear light and portable to be read on a plane, or ponderous and unsociable like a tortoise tucked away under an old motley cover. Whatever totality one makes of it, the essay generically seems predisposed to expose its own contrary – to turn itself inside out like the rebellious child of literary history that it is and resist the very habits of classification that define its Enlightened parent. It may display inherited patterns of the species, but its vitality lies in its unpredictability: if the essay is anything, it is protean in its attempt to be.[7]

Given these conditions, any effort to plug any gaps and assay, systematically, to introduce *The Cambridge History of the British Essay* as an airtight vessel of historical continuity would be worse than absurd: it would be an act of cowardice aimed to fend off criticism. Yet criticism, as this volume makes clear, is an important part of the essay tradition.[8] Rather than attempting to steer clear of it, let us take the first step here by saying that, had we chosen to replace the voice of Laura Marcus, Professor of English at New College, Oxford, whose untimely death took place during the composition of this volume, we might have had a chapter on the autobiographical essay, or the essay as life writing. Life sometimes writes itself in unexpected chapters,

(Ch. 7); and B. Schultz, 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian era' (Ch. 27). On the conduct manual: D. Gigante, 'On books: the bibliographical essay' (Ch. 15). On the travel journal: Schaff, 'A brief history of travel and the essay'. On the philosophical treatise: T. Milnes, 'Incoherence brought to order: empiricism and the essay' (Ch. 4) and E. Plunkett, 'Plain English: essays and analytic philosophy' (Ch. 28). On the reverie: M. Russett, 'Forms of thought: dreams, reverie, and the essay' (Ch. 18). On the gastronomical effusion: A.L. Tigner, 'Food and the essay' (Ch. 17). On the verse essay: J. Sider Jost, 'The art of criticism: essay as citation' (Ch. 9) and M. Wood, 'Undiplomatic relations: modernism and the essay' (Ch. 36). On the memoir: Reynolds, 'Performance and the Irish essay' and Majumdar, 'After empire'. On the blog: Pugh, 'Blogging in Britain'. And on the cine-essay: K. Wittman, 'Of human suffering: the essay and ekphrasis' (Ch. 40).

[7] Following this idea, see *The Essay: An Attempt, a Protean Form*, my edited collection (forum) in *Republics of Letters*, 4:1 (2014), https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/fora/essay-attempt-protean-form (accessed 5 August 2023).

[8] See, e.g., Sider Jost, 'The art of criticism'; J. Camlot, 'Victorian essays in criticism' (Ch. 23); and on the network of critical reviewing, M.P. Eve, 'The essay in the career of the contemporary British novelist' (Ch. 45).

which, in this case, we have chosen to let stand as a speaking absence representing so many losses that took place during the Covid pandemic.

From the chasm of loss, however, life sometimes springs, and as Saikat Majumdar remarks: 'The tradition of life writing is essential to the postcolonial essay in English, as becomes evident with some of its most exciting exponents from different parts of the former British Empire', whose autobiographical essayism his chapter proceeds to explore.[9] In another context, Kevin Brazil shows how life writing is an important part of the art criticism of Virginia Woolf and Vernon Lee,[10] whose essays are treated elsewhere in this volume in different contexts: of the New Woman movement (Rebecca Rainof, Chapter 34); of politics and propaganda surrounding the First World War (Rachel Baldacchino, Chapter 35); and of modernism (Michael Wood, Chapter 36). Eve Tavor Bannet discusses the autobiographical performance of selfhood in early British essays and letters, and Paige Reynolds does the same for the contemporary Irish essay. Uttara Natarajan sounds the 'familiar' voices of autobiographical urban essayists of the Romantic era, while Eric Tippin treats the ironies of life writing in the short-form essay as it developed between 1870 and 1920, as in G.K. Chesterton's 'A Piece of Chalk'. In an exciting intervention, David Russell discusses the role of life writing in the early days of psychoanalysis.[11]

Essays, autobiographical and otherwise, often incorporate idiosyncratic aspects of life and, had we the eidolon of an eighteenth-century essayist, we might here say a word about cats. More specifically, about one cat named Christabel whom we might – unfairly but truthfully – blame for the loss of a chapter on the character-essay. She did not eat it. Nor can we (strictly speaking) hold her accountable for the fact that it never materialised. But it is worth noting that Sir Thomas Overbury, author of a series of 'characters' from 1614, did not like cats. And that, while Nicholas Breton considered dedicating his *Characters vpon Essaies, Morall and Diuine* (1615) to his cat, he instead chose Francis Bacon for a muse: 'Worthy knight, I have read of many essays, and a kind of charactering of them, by such, as when I looked unto the form, or nature of their writing, I have been of the conceit that they were but imitators of your breaking the ice to their inventions.'[12] Whether Breton

[9] Majumdar, 'After empire'. [10] K. Brazil, 'The eye and the I: essay and image' (Ch. 39).
[11] Bannet, 'Between public and private'; Reynolds, 'Performance and the Irish essay'; E. Tippin, 'The short essay in context, 1870–1920' (Ch. 33); D. Russell, 'Feeling real: psychoanalysis and the essay' (Ch. 37).
[12] N. Breton, *Characters vpon Essaies, Morall and Diuine written for those good Spirits, that will take them in good part, and make vse of them to good purpose* (London: J. Gwillim, 1615), sigs. A3–4. I have modernised the text for fluency of reading.

would have placed John Earle, author of *Essays and Characters* (1628), among the imitators of Bacon, we, who have not studied the matter, cannot say. We must leave the character essayists swimming in cold waters beneath the 'broken ice' until someone, perhaps you, dear reader, decides to *go fish*.[13] In the meantime, let us leave the last word on this subject to Leigh Hunt, who opens one essay in a deviously noncommittal manner: 'A blazing fire, a warm rug, candles lit and curtains drawn, the kettle on for tea . . . and finally, the cat before you, attracting your attention, – it is a scene which everybody likes, unless he has a morbid aversion to cats; which is not common.'[14] But those words, from 'The Cat by the Fire' (1834), do not contain the *last* word. For that, we turn instead to an earlier essay by Hunt, 'A Day by the Fire' (1811), which opens: 'I am one of those that delight in a fireside, and can enjoy it without even the help of a cat or a tea-kettle. To cats, indeed, I have an aversion.'[15]

A chapter on animals (it occurs to us now) would indeed have sat nicely in this history of the essay. Alas, we cannot offer that, though the interested reader may discover the fate of animals in the ecocritical essay. For the last chapter of this volume, Richard Kerridge's 'The Essay, Ecocriticism, and the Anthropocene', contains some animal remains: a beached whale with one eye plucked out, a rotting lamb disembowelled by buzzards, the skull of a gannet, and some rabbit bones. More appetising, although less *searing*, we can also offer Amy L. Tigner's chapter, 'Food and the Essay' (Chapter 17). What *not* to eat, on the other hand, we learn from John Strachan's chapter 'Satire and the Essay' (Chapter 16), which discusses Jonathan Swift's 'Modest Proposal' as a model for later British essayists, who ravenously gobbled it up and spat it out in similar, bite-sized chunks of satire. Thanks to our cat, we have digressed, through animals, from essays to food, but at least we have Natalie M. Phillips and Sydney Logsdon to remind us that distraction has always been a key feature of the essay.[16] Still, to the point: thematic chapters like the ones named above challenge the ostensibly chronological order of this volume. Consider, as yet another example, Barbara Schaff's chapter 'A Brief History of Travel and the Essay' (Chapter 30), which begins with

[13] In Ch. 2 of this volume, 'Surprised into form', Kathryn Murphy discusses, briefly, Richard Flecknoe's *Characters, Made at Several Times and on Several Occasions* (1673). For those more interested in card games than fishing, however, we recommend 'Mrs. Battle's opinions on whist' (1821) by Charles Lamb.

[14] L. Hunt, 'The cat by the fire', *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, no. 35 (26 November 1834), 273.

[15] L. Hunt, 'A day by the fire', *The Reflector*, 2 (1811), 400.

[16] See N.M. Phillips and S. Logsdon, 'Loose sallies of the mind: distraction and the essay' (Ch. 12).

Bacon's 1594 essay 'Of Travel' addressed to young Englishmen on the Grand Tour and winds up in 2021, with Taran N. Khan, listening to 'other' voices in the capital of war-torn Afghanistan. Let us simply conclude that while a historiographical spine structures this volume, its organisational vagaries may be as interesting – indeed as necessary to life – as variants in nature.

Overall, the five sections of *The Cambridge History of the British Essay* are intended to retain a forward movement through time while highlighting patterns that emerge in the essay's long march toward futurity. In brief, these five sections address: (1) the formation of the British essay tradition in the early modern period; (2) its development through essay periodicals, clubs, coffeehouses, and other aspects of eighteenth-century culture;[17] (3) the morphing of the essay in the nineteenth century to serve the purposes of education,[18] cultural identity, and moral and political reform; (4) the fragmentation of identities, individual as well as communal, through such phenomena as decolonialisation, the traumas of World War, the articulation of feminism by the New Woman, the emergence of psychoanalysis, and the increasingly frenetic pace of life in modernity; and (5) contemporary engagements with the essay form through film and photography, literary theory,[19] public intellectualism, postcolonial subjectivity, performative identity, ecological consciousness, and digital media, from blogs to Substack newsletters. And now, we might add ChatGPT, a platform deploying artificial intelligence to enable computers to write essays in response to prompts – a new twist in the history of the essay that has some wondering: 'Will ChatGPT Kill the Student Essay?'[20]

More than 600 years of changing media and historical circumstance, however, have proven the resilience and adaptability of the essay. We hear its diverse sounds and styles ranging from plain to polemical, from didactic to dreamlike, and from contrarian to sublime. We can almost smell its

[17] To highlight a few of those aspects here: J.R. Wood, 'Essayistic personae and personhood' (Ch. 10); J. Mee and J. Buckley, 'Clubs and coffeehouses: sociability and the essay' (Ch. 11); P. Keen, 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' (Ch. 14).

[18] Among other chapters previously mentioned, see A. Lawrie, 'The essay and the rise of university English' (Ch. 22).

[19] Here we point the reader to R. McDonald, 'Essayism in literary theory' (Ch. 44).

[20] I. Dumitrescu, 'Will ChatGPT kill the student essay?', *The Walrus* (24 March 2023), https://thewalrus.ca/chatgpt-writing/; see too, S. Johnson, 'A.I. is mastering language: should we trust what it says?' *New York Times Magazine* (15 April 2022), www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/magazine/ai-language.html; and F. Manjoo, 'How do you know a human wrote this?', *New York Times* (29 July 2022), www.nytimes.com/2020/07/29/opinion/gpt-3-ai-automation.html (all accessed 5 August 2023). My thanks to Amanda Olson for fruitful discussion on this topic.

purposes – its subtleties and subversions – whether political or moral, utilitarian, evangelical or aestheticist. Often, we get a taste of an argumentative structure building, only to find it circling back, teasing us out of teleology into more recursive patterns of thought. Essays touch us too, often with that quality Hazlitt called *gusto*, an intense form of aesthetic experience involving more than one mode of sensation.[21] The essay, in short, is a dynamic form in which some of the brightest minds of our generation – and others – have attempted to speak of what seems most essential. One thinks of George Orwell and the New Orwellians – generations apart yet determined to say something meaningful as the condition for speaking at all.[22] At the same time, the essay, to borrow the etymology of the term from Montaigne as 'an attempt' or 'trial', belies the profound human stakes involved in any such attempt. The chapters of this book together are themselves an attempt – the first, perhaps, but likely not the last – to glimpse the future through the past of the essay in English.

[21] Hazlitt's essay 'On gusto' first appeared in 'The Round Table' series in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* on 26 May 1816.

[22] As discussed by Peter Marks in 'The essay and the public intellectual' (Ch. 43).

PART I

⋆

FORMING THE BRITISH ESSAY

1

Ancient Influences on the Essay

HENRY POWER

The essay, as Francis Bacon observed, has a classical pedigree. 'The word is late, but the thing is ancient', he says. 'For Seneca's epistles to Lucilius, if one mark them well, are but essays – that is, dispersed meditations, though conveyed in the form of epistles.'[1] Seneca's letters to his friend Lucilius – often referred to as the 'Moral Essays' – are an obvious point of reference for the early essay. These 124 letters have the broad aim of inculcating an understanding and appreciation of Stoic doctrine. The mid-seventeenth century was the high watermark of Neostoicism, and while many early English essayists espoused Stoic as well as other ancient principles, it was from a stylistic and formal, rather than philosophical, perspective that they did so. In his letters to Lucilius, Seneca ranged over a wide variety of topics: there are letters on crowds, on animals, on old age, and on drunkenness, all of which strike a note of sensible and easy conversation. The philosopher, he claims, should aim not for ascetic extremism, but for 'common sense, humanity, and intercourse and society'.[2] Such work as this set the tone for Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.

Although there is no equivalent term for 'essay' in Greek or Latin, ancient literature was instrumental to the development of the British essay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and this chapter will consider that development through the influence of three ancient sources for the essay tradition: Seneca, Plutarch, and Cicero. I will examine not only the way in which ancient approaches to reading and writing provided a model for early English essayists, but show how the essay became in turn an important route by which readers gained access to ancient texts and ideas.

[1] F. Bacon, manuscript dedication to Prince Henry quoted in M. Kiernan (ed.), *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. xlvii.

[2] Seneca, *The Workes of Lucius Annæus Seneca, both Morall and Naturall*, trans. T. Lodge (London: W. Stansby, 1614), p. 168. This text and others below, where indicated, have been modernised.

Classical Models: Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero

In a verse epistle to his friend Owen Feltham, written in the 1630s, the poet Thomas Randolph offers an overview of the Senecan style:

> I mean the style, being pure and strong and round,
> Not long but pithy: being short breath'd, but sound.
> Such as the grave, acute, wise *Seneca* sings,
> That best of tutor to the worst of kings.
> Not long and empty; lofty but not proud;
> Subtle but sweet, high but without a cloud.
> Well settled full of nerves, in brief 'tis such
> That in a little hath comprised much,
> Like th' *Iliads* in a Nutshell.[3]

Roger L'Estrange describes the Senecan style similarly in the preface to his abridgement of Seneca's Epistles: 'His Excellency Consists rather in a *Rhapsody* of Divine, and Extraordinary *Hints*, and *Notions*, than in any Regulated *Method* of Discourse.'[4] The influence on Bacon is clear enough, both in terms of the wide-ranging and gradually evolving form of the work as a whole ('dispersed meditations') and in terms of this aphoristic approach to communicating ideas.

The fact that Seneca's advice to Lucilius is conveyed in letters means that it unfolds haphazardly over time. Thomas Lodge's 1614 translation drops the greeting and sign-off from each letter, making the work more closely resemble an essay collection, but the epistolary form still shines through. In his eighty-first epistle Seneca offers a theory of prose which stresses the importance of concision and compactness, such that such aphoristic writing takes on the qualities of poetry: 'Those things are heard more negligently, and persuade less powerfully, as long as they are delivered in prose and ordinary discourse, but when as they are shut up in numbers and good sense, be enclosed in certain feet and cadences, that very sentence is darted and delivered as it were an arrow from a strong arm.'[5] Such compressed diction as Seneca espouses was fundamental to the English prose essay from its origins.

[3] T. Randolph, *Poems, with the Muses Looking-Glasse: And Amyntas* (Oxford: F. Bowman, 1638), p. 65, modernised.
[4] R. L'Estrange, Preface to *Seneca's Morals by Way of Abstract: Of Benefits*, Part 1 (London: T. Newcomb, 1679), p. vii.
[5] Seneca, *Workes*, p. 443.

The similarity of the Senecan and Baconian styles can be seen by comparing two brief passages:

> *Seneca*: Attalus the philosopher was wont to say, that it was a far more pleasant thing to make a friend, than to have a friend; as it is more agreeable to a painter to paint, than to have finished his picture . . . . The youth of our children is more fruitful unto us, but their infancy more sweet.[6]

> *Bacon*: The joys of parents are secret; and so are their griefs, and fears: they cannot utter the one; nor they will not utter the other. Children sweeten labours; but they make misfortunes more bitter: They increase the cares of life; but they mitigate the remembrance of death.[7]

What Bacon has in common with Seneca is his tightness of expression and staccato delivery. Seneca's final line might easily have found a place in Bacon's essay. Yet if one draws out and looks at the essays in their entirety, the same sentences serve a very different function. Seneca's observation about children is put to the service of a broader message: we will never feel a want of friendship if we take pleasure in the present rather than the future. Bacon is certainly sympathetic to that idea, but that is not the subject of his passage. Rather, his sentences lead into a set of quickfire observations on the nature of parenting, which takes in biblical wisdom, classical references, natural history, sociological observation, accounts of cultural difference, and practical advice. As he wrote in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), while praising the 'excellent virtues' of the aphoristic style, 'Aphorisms, except they should be ridiculous, cannot be made but of the pith and heart of sciences: for discourse of illustration is cut off, recitals of examples are cut off: discourse of connexion, and order is cut off; descriptions of practice, are cut off', leaving one with the broader message.[8]

If Seneca provided the primary stylistic model for the essay, Plutarch provided another influential model of its heterogeneous subject matter. Plutarch's *Moralia*, a collection of seventy-eight short pieces on a wide variety of topics, were written in Greek in the first century CE. Championed by Erasmus and translated into French by Jacques Amyot in 1572, they exerted a strong influence on Montaigne's *Essais*. Yet the title *Moralia* (often translated as *Moral Essays*) is a misnomer. Derived from the Greek Ἠθικά (*Ethika*), it originally referred only to a small group of the writings. Reid Barbour and Claire Preston point out the wide range of English labels attached to the

[6] Ibid., Ep. 9, pp. 174–5. [7] Bacon, *Essayes or Counsels*, p. 23.
[8] F. Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 124, text modernised.

sections of the work in the early modern period: 'dialogue', 'discourse', 'letter', 'declamation', 'treatise', 'apothegm', 'symposiac' – testament both to their variety, and to the lack of any suitable term in English; it is as though Plutarch's readers were waiting for the word *essay* to enter the language.[9]

Plutarch's 'essays' are in some cases concerned with practical ethics (often reflecting his own Platonist views), but they address a far greater range of topics than Seneca's: 'On Talkativeness', 'On Bashfulness', 'On Whether Land or Sea Animals are more Intelligent', 'On the Face which Appears in the Orb of the Moon'. Their most striking feature is what Joseph Addison called their 'multifarious erudition'; they are full of learning, worn lightly.[10] As Matthew Morgan wrote in the preface to a translation of Plutarch's *Morals*, 'he hath spread an entertainment, with provisions suitable to the palates of his guests; so that here is solid Nourishment for those of Strong complexions, and something more delicious for the effeminate Relish'.[11]

Although Plutarch is often dismissed as a derivative writer, much of the pleasure of reading him comes from the sheer range of authors he draws on. In *The Spectator*, Addison famously stated his intention of imitating Socrates, who had 'brought Philosophy down from Heaven to inhabit among Men' by bringing it 'out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses'.[12] He was consciously echoing Cicero, who makes a similar remark about Socrates in his *Tusculan Disputations* (5.4.10), written c. 45 BCE. He may not have known that he was also closely echoing Erasmus's praise of Plutarch: 'Socrates drew philosophy down from heaven to earth; Plutarch brought it into men's chambers and private apartments and bedrooms.'[13] From a stylistic point of view, Addison may have been resistant to the model provided by Plutarch, but the two authors took a similar approach to classical learning.

The pithy style derived from Seneca and Plutarch was often contrasted with the *copia*, or grandiloquence, associated with the Roman politician and orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero. William Cornwallis, whose *Essayes* were

[9] R. Barbour and C. Preston, 'Discursive and speculative writing' in P. Cheney and P. Hardie (eds.), *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, Vol. 2: *1558–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 466.

[10] J. Addison, *Tatler*, no. 226 (19 September 1710) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 3, p. 176.

[11] M. Morgan, Preface to *Plutarch's Morals: Translated from the Greek by Several Hands*, 5 vols. (London: J. Gellibrand, 1684), vol. 1, sig. A7v.

[12] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 45.

[13] Erasmus to Alexius Turzo (1525), quoted in J. Martindale (ed.), *English Humanism: Wyatt to Cowley* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 125.

published soon after Bacon's, suggested that 'the brain should dance a jig at the hearing a *Tullian* sound, and sit in council when it hears the other'.[14] The opposition between them was not so stark as is often suggested in the period; Seneca himself held Cicero up as a stylistic model.[15] Cicero left a vast range of works hardly reducible to a single style or form, and his influence on the essay is far from straightforward. He was a formidable orator, a moral philosopher, and an engaging letter writer. His expansive and often deeply personal letters to his family and friends (*Ad Familiares*) were imitated by Petrarch and other humanist scholars in the fourteenth century. They provided the major model for the familiar letter in Latin, and later in English, and can reasonably be regarded as the ancestor of the personal essay.

The informality of Cicero's letters is often contrasted with the grander rhetorical flights of his speeches, as in this tribute paid by Richard Steele's Sir Isaac Bickerstaff in *Tatler* no. 159: 'Everyone admires the orator and the consul; but for my part, I esteem the husband and the father. His private character, with all the little weaknesses of humanity, is as amiable, as the figure he makes in public is awful and majestic.'[16] This praise of Cicero follows four letters quoted from *Ad Familiares*, in which Cicero writes tearfully to his wife from exile in Thessalonica. The Ciceronian letters are intended to impress on eighteenth-century readers the dignity and significance of marriage (since even the great Cicero 'did not think it inconsistent with the politeness of his manners, or the greatness of his wisdom, to stand upon record in his domestic character').[17] He is important as a great prose stylist unafraid to write informally on domestic topics.

When Cicero is invoked as a counter-example to the Senecan style (as in the remark by Cornwallis quoted above), it is not the author of *Ad Familiares*, but of *De Officiis* ('On Duties'), a collection of philosophical treatises offering an overview of Stoic principles, who is referenced. Yet the latter text combined political commentary with anecdote and personal reflection; it was essentially concerned with the management of the self and had much in common with Seneca's Epistles. Cicero's philosophical and rhetorical writings became a cornerstone of an English grammar-school education

[14] W. Corn-Waleys [Cornwallis], 'Of vanitie' in *Essayes* (London: E. Mattes, 1601), n.p., text modernised.
[15] See Seneca, *Workes*, Ep. 100, p. 423. For Cicero's stylistic influence on Seneca, see M. von Albrecht, *Cicero's Style: A Synopsis* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
[16] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 159 (15 April 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 2, p. 392, text modernised.
[17] Ibid.

during the early modern period, despite the fact that his distinctive high style had its critics. John Dryden described the French historian Louis Maimbourg as 'rather Ciceronian, copious, florid, and figurative; than succinct'.[18]

Cicero also became a frequent model for the eighteenth-century essayist. Addison's contributions to *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were frequently held up as ideal examples of English Ciceronianism, though Addison keenly was alert to the dangers of excessive imitation of the great orator. *Tatler* no. 224 ridicules a grandiloquent advertisement for lavender water 'written altogether in the *Ciceronian* manner'.[19] William Melmoth, who produced a translation of Cicero's *Ad Familiares*, suggested in 1749 (under the pen name of Thomas Fitzosborne) that Ciceronian 'grace' first entered the English language in the essays of Sir William Temple, but that it was perfected by Addison: 'the becoming air which Tully [Cicero] esteemed the criterion of fine composition . . . is the prevailing characteristic' of Addison's prose.[20]

The first person to hold Addison up as a new Cicero was Addison himself. In *The Spectator* no. 476, he drew an extended and elaborate comparison between the two classical models, Senecan and Ciceronian, available to the essayist:

> Among my daily papers which I bestow on the public, there are some which are written with regularity and method, and others that run out into the wildness of those compositions which go by the name of *Essays*. As for the first, I have the whole scheme of the discourse in my mind before I set pen to paper. In the other kind of writing, it is sufficient that I have several thoughts on a subject, without troubling myself to range them in such an order, that they may seem to grow out of one another, and be disposed under the proper Heads. *Seneca* and *Montaigne* are patterns for writing in this last kind, as *Tully* and *Aristotle* excel in the other. When I read an author of genius who writes without method, I fancy myself in a wood that abounds with a great many noble objects, rising among one another in the greatest confusion and disorder. When I read a methodical discourse, I am in a regular plantation, and can place myself in its several centres, so as to take a view of all the lines and walks that are struck from them. You may ramble in the one a whole day together, and every moment discover something or other that is new to you; but when you have done, you will have but a

[18] J. Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, Vol. 18: *The History of the League*, ed. A. Roper and V.A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 415.
[19] J. Addison, *Tatler*, no. 224 (14 September 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 3, p. 169.
[20] T. Fitzosborne, *Letters on Several Subjects. By the late Sir Thomas Fitzosborne, Bart.*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: M. Owen, 1749), p. 76.

> confused imperfect notion of the place: In the other, your eye commands the whole prospect, and gives you such an idea of it, as is not easily worn out of the memory.[21]

Addison initially indicates that *The Spectator* papers fall into both categories, but goes on to express a distinct preference for Cicero's approach. This is not only – or even mostly – about sentences: it is evident that Addison's prose, with its suspended syntax and relative grammatical complexity, is written according to a Ciceronian model. Where he sees himself as alternately embracing both modes is in terms of his organisation of material, and perhaps the most striking aspect of this taxonomy is that Addison claims his approach is Senecan insofar as it is essayistic. The papers which qualify as Ciceronian lack the 'wildness' that would qualify them as essays. Few readers today would hesitate to describe Addison's papers on *Paradise Lost* (*Spectator* nos. 267–86) as 'essays', but Addison apparently categorised them differently, given that their structure is clearly set out (and advertised) in advance. The categorisation is significant, since these are papers in which Addison attempted to persuade his readers towards an appreciation of Milton's poem that would allow for its little 'faults' or 'blemishes'.[22] In other words, their aim was to encourage the broad view enabled by a methodical Ciceronian approach. In *The Spectator* as a whole, we are asked to notice a distinction between the essayistic (Senecan) and rhetorical (Ciceronian) approaches, and to couch that distinction in classical terms.

It is worth adding that while *The Spectator* may have its Ciceronian moments, the work as a whole conforms to the Senecan epistemological model. Addison used the image of landscape 'cut through by abundance of beautiful alleys' in his *Dialogues upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals* (1721), in which the three interlocutors gradually discover how numismatics can enhance their understanding of classical literature.[23] Whereas that orderly, tripartite work reflects the symbolic landscape in which the dialogues take place, in *The Spectator* there is no possibility for enjoying such a grand vista – despite the series of papers on Milton. The division of authorship between Addison and Steele, and the frequent intrusion of readerly letters, make for a reading experience that is far from orderly. Mr Spectator himself is the

[21] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 476 (5 September 1712) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 4, p. 186.
[22] See D. Gigante, 'Milton's spots: Addison on *Paradise Lost*' in B. Hoxby and A.B. Coiro (eds.), *Milton in the Long Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 7–21.
[23] A.C. Guthkelch (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, 2 vols. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914), vol. 2, p. 377, Addison's text modernised.

structuring device of the essays, moving casually through the thick of things, but rarely in a position to take the Ciceronian bird's-eye view.

The Mellification and Digestion of the Ancients

In *The Battel of the Books* (1704), Jonathan Swift describes an encounter between a spider and a bee that serves as a model for different approaches to literary production. The bee stands for the Senecan method. His habit, he tells the spider, is to 'visit, indeed, all the flowers and blossoms of the field and the garden, but whatever I collect from thence, enriches myself, without the least injury to their beauty, their smell, or their taste'. The bee's relation to the flowers corresponds to the reading practices advocated by Swift and other self-styled 'Ancients'. He operates 'by universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things', ultimately bringing home 'honey and wax' – that is to say, sweetness and light. The more modern spider, on the other hand, generates his material from within, possessing 'a genuine store of dirt and poison in [his] breast'.[24]

Swift's bee, fittingly enough, has a long literary pedigree. Bacon had, in his *Instauratio*, identified three categories of thinkers, which he likened to spiders, ants, and bees:

> The empirics, in the manner of the ant, only store up and use things; the rationalists, in the manner of spiders, spin webs from their own entrails; but the bee takes the middle path: it collects its material from the flowers of field and garden, but its special gift is to convert and digest it. The true job of philosophy is not much different.[25]

Swift would no doubt have been familiar with Bacon's analogy, and even more so with Sir William Temple's reuse of it in 'Of Poetry', having served as Temple's private secretary and the editor of his works. Temple compares poets to bees, who 'must range through fields as well as gardens, choose such flowers as they please . . . They must work upon their cells, with admirable art, extract their honey with infinite labour.'[26]

[24] J. Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, ed. M. Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 150–1 (italics reversed).

[25] F. Bacon, *Instauratio Magna* in *The Instauratio Magna, Part II: Novum organum and Associated Texts*, ed. G. Rees and M. Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 153.

[26] W. Temple, 'Of poetry' in J.E. Spingarn (ed.), *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 84.

This image for gathering and processing beauties, identified by Temple and Swift as a model for their own *modus operandi*, originates with Seneca. In Epistle no. 84, Seneca writes: 'We ought, as they say, to imitate bees, which wander up and down, and pick fit flowers to make honey: then whatsoever they have brought they dispose and place through their combs.'[27] The most important aspect of Seneca's example is not the product, but the process: the gathering and the deliberate combination of different blossoms to create something new. As he says in the same epistle, 'whatsoever is gathered together by reading, the pen may reduce into a body'.[28] Seneca provides a model for reading which is consonant with the values of the ancients, but also a model for reading them. Bacon's essays, dense not only with allusion but with quotation, are evidence of a lifetime's gathering from classical authors. Brian Vickers has suggested with reference to Bacon that 'readers must learn to see quotations as simultaneously foreign, the result of an individual author's reading, and yet an integral part of the text, having been appropriated for and indeed by it'.[29] We might call this the process of mellification.

Swift's bee is clearly a Senecan one, and an essayistic mode of assimilating classical literature is opposed to a modern approach in which ancient material is disregarded in favour of self-generated 'Dirt and Poison'. In *A Tale of a Tub*, Swift assumes the role of a 'most devoted Servant of all *Modern* Forms', holding ancient writings in disdain because they do not address modern concerns. He grudgingly concedes that Homer is 'not without some Abilities', but he lambasts him satirically for 'his gross Ignorance in the *Common Laws of this Realm*, and in the Doctrine as well as Discipline of the Church of *England*', not to mention his unsatisfactory treatments of topics such as political wagering, spleen, and tea.[30] The narrator of the *Tale* is not interested in the kind of universality that can enable communication across the centuries. He considers it impossible for an author to speak to the present age without speaking of it from a condition of historical embeddedness.

The Senecan idea of the essay as a mellification of ancient wisdom proved durable. Oliver Goldsmith called his periodical founded in 1759 *The Bee*, declaring in its opening number that his own essayistic practice was to 'rove

[27] Seneca, *Workes*, p. 348 (the lines quoted from Virgil are from *Aeneid*, book 1, ll. 432–3).
[28] Ibid.
[29] B. Vickers, Introduction to *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xlii.
[30] Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, p. 83.

from flower to flower, with seeming inattention, but concealed choice, expatiate over all the beauties of the season, and make my industry my amusement'.[31] The same metaphor was adopted by Leigh Hunt. Writing in the person of 'Harry Honeycomb', as Denise Gigante observes, Hunt not only invokes Seneca's apian approach to gathering material ('beauties'), but also aims to compile 'a storehouse of specifically literary sweets'.[32]

The industrious and pleasure-providing bee had its less salubrious counterpart. English writers also inherited from Seneca's Epistle no. 84 a habit of seeing essay writing as a process of digestion:

> Then using the ability and care of our wit, to mingle diverse liquors into one taste: that although it shall appear whence it is taken, yet that it may appear to be some other thing than that whence it was taken: which thing we see nature does in our body, without any help of us. Nourishment which we have taken, so long as it abides in quality, and swims solid in the stomach is a burden; but when it is changed from that which it was, then at length it passes into strength and into blood.[33]

Here we have the clearest possible statement of the essay as a way of assimilating prior reading such that the source text retains something of its original essence, but also metabolises to contribute meaningfully to the composition of its new host. For Seneca, digestion is an almost entirely positive metaphor, and Bacon follows him in this approach. But there is still an implied risk, explored by Persius in his stomach-churning fifth satire, that such intellectual 'nourishment' may not undergo a digestive process, and rot in the stomach. Indeed, there is something less than enthusiastic in Samuel Johnson's definition of an essay as a 'loose verbal sally' or 'irregular undigested piece' – a cluster of words that recall the kind of gastric difficulties Johnson experienced throughout his life, and which were especially acute while he was compiling his *Dictionary of the English Language*.[34] At the

[31] O. Goldsmith, *The Bee; Being Essays on the Most Interesting Subjects* (London: J. Wilkie, 1759), p. 3.

[32] D. Gigante, 'On coffee-houses, smoking, and the English essay tradition' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 154; as well as glancing at the Senecan tradition, the name would have reminded readers of the affable hedonist Will Honeycomb, a member of the 'Spectator Club'.

[33] Seneca, *Workes*, p. 348.

[34] See D. Nokes, *Samuel Johnson: A Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 186. On Johnson's concept of the essay as a loose sally of mind, see the 'Rambling in the essay' section in N. Phillips and S. Logsdon's 'Loose sallies of the mind: distraction and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 12).

inception of the essay genre proper, Montaigne highlighted this risk, writing of authors for whom 'the learning that could not reach their mind remains on their tongue' – and adding that 'it is a sign of rawness and indigestion to disgorge food just as we swallowed it'.[35] This metaphor is, as Thomas Karshan notes, paradoxically reversible: an essay is expected both to present earlier material in a digested state and to put on display the processes of digestion. But the real point is that writing an essay involves processing pre-existing (often classical) materials.

English authors readily connected the densely allusive practices of Seneca and Plutarch with the ubiquitous practice of commonplacing, whereby educated and attentive readers would systematically note down literary passages under different headings for future use in composition.[36] Morgan, in the preface quoted above, writes that Plutarch's 'way was that of the Common-Place Book'.[37] And in his translation of Plutarch's 'Of the Tranquility of the Mind', an essay studded with quotations from Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Simonides, and others, he depicts the Greek author mining his commonplace book for commentary on a certain subject: 'I have transcrib'd my *Common-Place* Book, and hastily put together those Collections, which I had by me concerning this Subject.'[38] Here, Plutarch's notebooks or aides-memoire (ὑπομνήματα) emerge as commonplace books. As in this Plutarchan example, there was always the potential for lazy authors simply to transcribe the contents of their notebooks. In *Tom Jones*, a novel whose narrator regularly slips into a classicising, essayistic mode, Henry Fielding offers a sketch of a cantankerous parson delivering an oral dissertation 'against Anger', which 'he enriched with many valuable quotations from the ancients, particularly from *Seneca*; who has indeed so well handled this passion, that none but a very angry man can read him without great pleasure and profit'. However, we learn that the parson's harangue concludes 'with the famous story of *Alexander* and *Clytus*', and since the narrator has that story entered elsewhere (tellingly, under 'Drunkenness') in his commonplace book, he tells us, 'I shall not insert it here.'[39]

[35] Montaigne, 'Of three kinds of association' and 'Of the education of children', quoted by T. Karshan in 'What is an essay? Thirteen answers from Virginia Woolf' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 43.

[36] See A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3).

[37] Morgan, Preface to *Plutarch's Morals*, vol. 1, sig. A3v.

[38] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 130.

[39] H. Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, ed. M. Battestin and F. Bowers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 303–4 (and above), text modernised.

Ancient Transmission

The essay was not only a form that was assimilated from the ancient world, as discussed above, but also – and to a much greater extent – a major route through which ancient ideas and writings were transmitted to modern readers. This function is particularly striking in the early eighteenth-century periodical essay and becomes more prominent after the Restoration. Abraham Cowley, in *Several Discourses, by Way of Essays in Verse and Prose* (1668), follows Seneca (and Montaigne) in their emphasis on retirement and self-awareness. His essays are also studded with brief quotations, often massaged or truncated in order to fit the essayist's larger aims. As Paul Davis writes of Cowley's allusive practice, 'There is a thin line between being on the same wavelength and tuning out difference, feeling that you are forever taking the words right out of a friend's mouth and putting words into that friend's mouth.'[40] As Johnson put it, Cowley benefited from 'an intellectual digestion that concocted the pulp of learning, but refused the husks'.[41] Besides digesting a range of sources, Cowley also presented the reader with much larger, undigested passages. It was his essay 'On Agriculture' that first introduced English readers to his celebrated translations of the sixth satire of Horace's second book ('The Country Mouse'), itself digested from Aesop, and to the praises of country life from the second book of Virgil's *Georgics*.

Despite its larger scale, Cowley's version of Horace's second Epode is a classic example of commonplace quotation which simultaneously resists and communicates its original meaning. The poem is concerned with the delights of rural retirement, but it ends with a sudden shift in perspective when the reader learns that the whole account has been the daydream of a city-bound moneylender, Alfius. Eliminating the final twist allows Cowley to present a less complicated version of Horace's poem, no longer a reflection on the distance between human aspirations and human behaviour but a straightforward paean to the countryside. But the translation is more complicated than that. As Davis has shown, its main section is shot through with the imagery of commerce and finance. To give one example, Cowley's Alfius does not merely hide (*condit*) pressed honey (*pressa . . . mella*), but 'Stores up the Golden Treasures of the Bee'.[42] Cowley, in other words,

[40] P. Davis, *Translation and the Poet's Life: The Ethics of Translating in English Culture, 1646–1726* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 104.

[41] S. Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. R. Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), vol. 1, p. 192.

[42] A. Cowley, *The Essays and other Prose Writings*, ed. A.B. Gough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915), p. 158.

manages to register the original import of the poem (the tension between Alfius's dreams and his actions), while simultaneously adapting it to fit the contours of his own argument. Nonetheless, the presence of longer translations and imitations, usually at the end of Cowley's essays, has a substantially different effect. Here the essay not only explores a philosophical position and works together a number of instructive passages under a single head (though it certainly does both those things), but also serves as a vessel through which passages from ancient authors can reach a broad modern readership.

This practice became more widespread in the periodical essay of the eighteenth century. The pages of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are full of quotations, translations, and imitations from the classics. One essay on jealousy, stretched across *Spectator* nos. 170 and 171, is prompted by 'the Letters of my female correspondents', and the theme explored through a familiar mix of anecdote, social commentary, aphorism, and classical and biblical reference (Terence, Ovid, Juvenal, Ecclesiastes). Where the essay feels different from the Baconian–Senecan model is in the more substantial, indigested incorporations of classical material. The two-part *Spectator* essay concludes with a two-page account of Herod's jealous treatment of his queen, Mariamne. Addison indicates that he has 'collected it out of *Josephus*', while several close verbal echoes of Roger L'Estrange's 1702 translation of Josephus's *Works* make it clear that the story of Herod is a virtual precis of L'Estrange's edition.[43] Earlier, Addison mentions that jealousy is 'admirably described by *Horace* in his Ode to *Lydia*'. Rather than simply referring to the poem in passing, he gives both text and translation in full, claiming that he conveniently has a translation to hand, namely, the one published in his own *Remarks on Italy* (1705).

Here as elsewhere in *The Spectator*, the essay becomes a means by which readers can access stories and poems from antiquity, the essayist working to store up classical learning as well as to develop it into something new. Terence Bowers has argued persuasively that the reason for the extraordinarily broad and durable appeal of *The Spectator* lay less in Addison's elegant prose than in the practical utility of the essays. Yet the two cannot be disentangled quite so easily as Bowers suggests. One of the practical uses to which readers like Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson put *The Spectator* was as a template for their own prose style.[44] But Bowers is

[43] R. L'Estrange (trans.), *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (London: R. Sare, 1702), pp. 420–1, 429–32.

[44] B. Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. L.W. Labaree (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 61–2. Franklin was following the advice with which Johnson concludes his 'Life of Addison': 'Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not

certainly right to say that once the periodical was printed in book form and equipped with an index enabling ready access to the riches within it, the '*Spectator* became a kind of commonplace book for civil society, serving both as a storehouse for information, ideas, and arguments that individuals could use in conversation . . . and as a cultural guide that demarcated the literary, historical and philosophical reference points within which polite society operated'.[45]

The period which saw the rise of the English periodical essay also witnessed a systematic attempt to make Greek and Latin texts available to English readers.[46] The same entrepreneurial urges which resulted in translations of the classics and the establishment of periodicals such as *The Spectator* drove their significant afterlife in book form. In this respect, English essays communicated to a wider audience a huge mass of classical material – often in tiny fragments. The first number of *The Tatler* took as its motto a famous line of Juvenal: *Quicquid agunt Homines nostri Farrago Libelli*: 'whatever humans do [is] the *farrago* of our book'.[47] A *farrago* – often translated into English as 'hotchpotch' – is another figure for the transmission of classical texts. Neither flowers processed into honey, nor food metabolised by a body, the miscellaneous jumble in Latin derives from the grain mash given to cattle. And though the motto refers primarily to the wide range of material in *The Tatler*, it is also an effective metaphor for the way in which early modern essayists drew together a selection of classical bits and pieces, also in the form of the mottoes and epigraphs that became a hallmark of the periodical essay.

The classical sources on which early essayists drew were not limited to the strictly canonical, or the literary, or to ancient precursors of the form. There were classical sources of a more miscellaneous flavour which have largely gone unremarked by modern scholars, probably because they are typically unmentioned by the authors who deploy them. Fragments of Aulus Gellius's *Noctes Atticae* (*Attic Nights*), which throughout the early modern period 'served as a great quarry' of ancient learning, can be found throughout early

coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison' (*Lives of the Poets*, vol. 3, p. 38).

[45] T. Bowers, 'Universalizing sociability: *The Spectator*, civic enfranchisement, and the rule(s) of the public sphere' in D.J. Newman (ed.), *The Spectator: Emerging Discourses* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 162.

[46] On this project, driven largely by the booksellers Jacob Tonson, Bernard Lintot, and Robert Dodsley, see S. Gillespie and P. Wilson, 'The publishing and readership of translation' in Gillespie and Hopkins (eds.), *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Vol. 3: *1660–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 38–51 (esp. pp. 40–3).

[47] Steele is quoting Juvenal's first Satire, ll. 85–6.

British essays – more than we may ever trace.[48] The same is true of stories from Valerius Maximus's *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, a collection of around 1,000 exemplary tales written in Latin early in the first century BCE, and widely read during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps more for their moral utility than their literary merit. When Fielding (to give one example) refers to the story of Herostratus ('the Wretch who burnt the Temple at *Ephesus*') in an essay on fame, he is drawing on Valerius Maximus.[49] And what is true of Valerius is true also of Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* ('The Dinner Party Philosophers'), a third-century CE Greek work which presents a vast quantity of literary fragments and cultural trivia in the form of table talk, or conversation over dinner.

As Warren Boutcher has noted, the idea of the essay as classical miscellany was enthusiastically embraced later in the century by Vicesimus Knox, whose wide-ranging *Winter Evenings* (1788) was intended as an English version of *Attic Nights*.[50] Knox mounted a spirited defence of the miscellaneous, insisting that various miscellaneous works (including the *Deipnosophistae*) should be classified as essays. He also reclassified the ancient forerunners of the essay as miscellaneous: 'What are Seneca's Epistles but moral miscellanies?'[51] Knox's enthusiasm for the miscellaneous in ancient learning may have been atypical (however tongue-in-cheek), but it points to a way of reading essays that should not be overlooked: a means of accessing, unsystematically and hedonistically, the wisdom of the ancients.

[48] A. Grafton, 'Conflict and harmony in the *Collegium Gellianum*' in L. Holford-Strevens and A. Vardi (eds.), *The Worlds of Aulus Gellius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). A. Vine provides further context on Aulus Gellius in 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' in this volume.

[49] H. Fielding, *Contributions to The Champion and Related Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 34 (27 November 1739).

[50] See W. Boutcher, 'The Montaignian essay and authored miscellanies from antiquity to the nineteenth century' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, pp. 55–77.

[51] Vicesimus Knox, *Winter Evenings; or, Lucubrations on Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Chamberlaine, Moncrieffe, et al., 1788), vol. 1, p. 50.

2

Surprised into Form: The Beginnings of the English Essay

KATHRYN MURPHY

When does the English essay begin? Trying to answer this question – or avoiding it – has been a preoccupation since the form's beginning. In what was only the second collection of prose published in English which called itself 'essays', William Cornwallis included a piece entitled 'Of Essayes, & Bookes', the earliest example of the ever-proliferating subgenre of the essay on essays. It begins with a declaration of priority: 'I hold neither *Plutarch's*, nor none of these ancient short manner of writings, nor *Montaigne's*, nor such of this latter time to be rightly termed essays, for though they be short, yet they are strong, and able to endure the sharpest trial.'[1] Cornwallis inaugurates two contradictory habits of essay criticism which still prevail: an extension of the reach of the word 'essay' beyond its use, to encompass Plutarch's *Moralia* and other ancient writings, probably including Seneca's familiar epistles; and an insistence that not all things which call themselves essays deserve the name.[2] The critic Ted-Larry Pebworth, striving to define the early essay, complained, like Cornwallis, that 'the problem' of the early essay 'is exacerbated by the fact that writers of the late Renaissance occasionally applied the label to works which were not true essays'.[3] Cornwallis dismissed Michel de Montaigne, whose *Essais* (1580) was the first book to carry that title, and writers of 'this latter time', among them certainly Francis Bacon, whose *Essayes* (1597) were Cornwallis's only prose predecessor in the

[1] W. Cornwallis, 'Of essayes and bookes' in *A Second part of Essayes* (London: E. Mattes, 1601), sig. Gg8v. The signatures show that, despite the separate title page, this volume is a unit with the *Essayes* (London: E. Mattes, 1600): all the essays '*go together*', Cornwallis states in his note 'To the reader', in the *Second part*, sig. N4v. The texts of early modern essays have been modernised throughout.

[2] See the previous chapter of this volume, H. Power's 'Ancient influences on the essay' (Ch. 1), for a discussion of Plutarch and Seneca.

[3] T.L. Pebworth, 'Not being, but passing: defining the early English essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 10:2 (1977), 17.

English press. 'But mine', Cornwallis declares, '*are* Essays.'[4] His approach to the problem of the origins of the English essay is more radical than most: if we take him at his word, he is the first essayist, English or otherwise.

Starting with Cornwallis diverts us from one of the habitual moves in discussions of the early essay: its twin birth in Montaigne and Bacon, and the two models of the essay offered by those founder figures. Contrasting the digressive self-revelations of Montaigne with the didactic impersonality of Bacon is common in criticism, which divides over who was more influential on subsequent English essayists.[5] Most recently, Alan Stewart has argued for a 'counter-history of the early English essay' less invested in the self-exposure associated with Montaigne, and 'more in a future-oriented and collaborative mode' stemming from Bacon.[6] But Cornwallis's temporal paradoxes suggest that a more complex idea of origins may be needed when it comes to the essay. Cornwallis's essays are truly essays, he claims, because he is a 'newly bound Prentice to the inquisition of knowledge', who 'use[s] these papers as a Painter's boy a board, that is trying to bring his hand and his fancy acquainted': the work of an apprentice. The essay should not withstand the 'sharpest trial'; rather than being tried, it tries or attempts. It is a 'manner of writing', he goes on, 'like a circumspect runner trying for a start'.[7] Essays are a preliminary activity, Cornwallis suggests: anticipation of the thing, and not the thing itself, 'less works than workings out', in Scott Black's excellent phrase.[8] If Cornwallis's are the first English essays, as he would have us believe, it is not just because they are unfinished, but because they don't even get started. The hesitant runner, miming beginning without actually getting down to it, is an accidental figure for the repeated false starts of the essay form, for its multiple and complex beginnings, and, as this chapter will argue, for the way it represents the process of thought.

[4] Cornwallis, 'Of essayes and bookes', sig. Gg8v, emphasis mine.

[5] See, e.g., J. Scodel, 'The early English essay' in R. DeMaria, Jr., H. Chang, and S. Zacher (eds.), *A Companion to British Literature*, Vol. 2: *Early Modern Literature, 1450–1660* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 213; P. Salzman, 'Essays' in A. Hadfield (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose, 1500–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 468–83, esp. pp. 468–9. On Montaigne and Bacon, see also K. Murphy, 'Of sticks and stones: the essay, experience, and experiment' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 78–96.

[6] A. Stewart, 'The birth of the English essay' in M. Aquilina, B. Cowser, Jr., and N.B. Wallack (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 38.

[7] Cornwallis, 'Of essayes and bookes', sig. Gg8v.

[8] S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 6.

Surprised into the Essay

Despite Cornwallis's quibbles, most genres do not have an origin point as easy to date as the essay. Before Montaigne's *Essais* of 1580, the word had not been used in print to name a type of writing; after that work, 'essays' proliferated. The 'birth-year of the English essay' is likewise apparently straightforward: Bacon's little octavo of 1597, entitled *Essayes. Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion*, inaugurated the essay tradition in English.[9] The form was recognised as his innovation. In 1615, Nicholas Breton dedicated his *Characters upon Essaies* to Bacon, whom he described as 'breaking the ice' for subsequent essayists.[10] Between 1597 and Bacon's death in 1626, twenty-two other collections calling themselves essays were published, ranging in content from poetic satires to devotional works.[11] Bacon's third and final revision of his own essays bears a periphrastic title, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (1625). That 'or' makes *Counsels* an alternative name for the form, explaining what was still a novel word. The glossing title, qualifying the counsels as '*Civill and Morall*', suggests that 'essay' was being applied to an existing tradition of moral discourse to which these new-named pieces could be assimilated.

When Montaigne's essays first appeared in English, in John Florio's 1603 translation, the book was called *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike, and Millitarie Discourses*. Expanding Montaigne's simple '*Essais*', the English title closely emulates an earlier translation from French, Jacques Hurault's *Politicke, Moral, and Martiall Discourses* (1595), which, in three books, surveyed matters of state under titles familiar from Montaigne and Bacon, like 'Of the Education or Bringing up of a Prince', 'Of Truth', 'Of Religion and Superstition', 'Of Wisdom, or Discreetness'.[12] Several other pre-1597 books of miscellaneous prose pieces expanding on commonplaces also strongly resembled what would soon be called essays. The anonymous *Remedies*

[9] J.B. Price, 'The pioneers of the English essay', *The Contemporary Review*, 178 (1950), 295.

[10] N. Breton, *Characters vpon Essaies Morall, and Diuine* (London: J. Gwillim, 1615), sig. A3v. Discussed by M. Kiernan's Introduction to F. Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. xlix; and see Stewart, 'Birth of the English essay', p. 37.

[11] Not counting further editions of already published works; the total number of separate editions is thirty-six. My thanks to Sarah Moorhouse for her help with this bibliographical work.

[12] The work was first published in French in 1588 as *Trois livres des offices d'estat*; the English translation was the work of Arthur Golding. Cf. E. de Molinier, *Essayes: or, Morall and Politicall Discourses*, trans. W. Tyrwhitt (London: W. Sheares, 1636), which originally bore the title *Politiques chrétiennes* (1621).

against Discontentment, drawen into several Discourses, from the Writings of Ancient Philosophers (1596), included titles like 'Of the Diversity of Men's Actions', 'Of the Choice of Friends', 'Of Dissembling', 'Of Vanity', 'Of Death' – all topics treated by Montaigne or Bacon, or both. Disconcertingly, Haly Heron's *New Discourse of Morall Philosophie, entituled, The Kayes of Counsaile*, a collection of nine short prose reflections dotted with stylish passages, was published in 1579, with a preface dated 1578, two years before Montaigne.[13] The title 'Essays' thus marked a confluence between various existing kinds of short prose writing: political 'discourses'; moral precepts focused on Stoic questions of how to live; and miscellaneous gentlemanly advice, counsel, and sociability.[14]

Indeed, neither Montaigne nor Bacon initially thought of themselves as having invented the essay. Montaigne refers to the individual pieces within his volume as 'chapitres' (chapters); '*Essais*' names the tentative nature of the whole project. The title *Essayes* may not even have been Bacon's; the texts included in the 1597 edition circulated in manuscript beyond his control, and their publication forestalled an unauthorised text, entered on the Stationers' Register on 24 January 1597, as 'a booke entituled *ESSAYES* of M.F.B.', the kind of heading a circulating manuscript might acquire once out of its author's reach. In 1612, Bacon briefly glossed '*Essaies*' as 'dispersed Meditations'.[15] Florio, similarly, introducing his translation of Montaigne in 1603, exclaimed, '*Why Essays are but men's school-themes pieced together; you might as well say, several texts*.'[16] Dispersed, several, or, as a later publisher had it, 'mixed matter', essays could at first only be recognised in the plural, as a

[13] James VI of Scotland also preceded Bacon in print, publishing *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the Divine Arte of Poesie* (Edinburgh: T. Vautroullier, 1584), a volume of poems with a prose treatise on poetics, all in Scots. On the English essay before 1597, see V.B. Heltzel, 'Haly Heron: Elizabethan essayist and euphuist', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 16:1 (1952), 1–21; Price, 'Pioneers'; and S. Thomas, '*The Lord Marquess' Idleness*: the first English book of essays', *Studies in Philology*, 45:4 (1948), 592–9. John Lee proposes Roger Ascham's *Toxophilus* (1544), which calls itself an 'assay', and the writings of Thomas Churchyard, gathered in *Churchyard's Challenge* (1593), as predecessors: J. Lee, 'The English Renaissance essay: Churchyard, Cornwallis, Florio's Montaigne and Bacon' in M. Hattaway (ed.), *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, 2 vols. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), vol. 2, pp. 438–9.

[14] For other predecessors of the essay, see W. Boutcher, 'The Montaignean essay and authored miscellanies from antiquity to the nineteenth century' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, pp. 55–77; and Power, 'Ancient influences on the essay', in this volume.

[15] Bacon, *Essayes*, ed. Kiernan, p. 317.

[16] J. Florio, 'To the curteous reader' in M. Montaigne, *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. J. Florio (London: E. Blount, 1603), sig. A5v; original italics. On the relation between the essay and the theme, see T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme' in this volume (Ch. 20).

miscellany.[17] Singly, they were meditations, themes, 'fragments of my conceits', as Bacon put it in the dedicatory epistle to his 1597 volume.[18] While Montaigne in 1580 and Bacon in 1597 published volumes of essays, neither of them wrote a singular essay. Here, again, Cornwallis innovated: each of his pieces published in 1600 is labelled an essay: 'Essay I', 'Essay II', and so on. Robert Johnson's *Essaies, Or Rather Imperfect Offers* (1601), the third volume of prose essays published in English, followed suit. By the early seventeenth century, it had become possible to write *an* essay: the word now named a literary form. Montaigne and Bacon, then, were surprised into the essay.

At the same time, as Bacon wrote in the dedication to his essays in 1612, though 'the word is late, ... the thing is ancient'.[19] The early essay was poised between novelty and venerability, its authors at once epigones and innovators, something also clear in their tone: although early essays often adopted the posture of wisdom writing, they were frequently written by very young men. Cornwallis was about twenty when he published his *Essayes*; Owen Felltham was eighteen when he wrote his first book of *Resolves*, and about twenty-one when they were printed;[20] and John Hall was about nineteen when his *Horæ vacivæ, or Essays* appeared in print. Cornwallis's figure of the 'circumspect runner', trying for a start but not committing to it, probing a way of beginning without actually acting, suggests both the young essayist's hesitation on the brink, and a form itself yet to appear. György Lukács describes the essayist as 'a John the Baptist who goes out to preach in the wilderness about another who is still to come, whose shoelace he is not worthy to untie'.[21] The essay as a form began before it started, did not emerge until after it had begun, and even once in the world, conceived of itself as preliminary to something that had not yet arrived.

[17] See Edward Blount's prefatory letter to the anonymous *Horæ subsecivæ. Observations and Discourses* (London: Edward Blount, 1620), usually attributed to William Cavendish, or to Cavendish and Thomas Hobbes: '*The Book, you see, is of mixed matter, by the way of observations, or Essays, and Discourses*', sig. A2v.

[18] Bacon, *Essayes*, ed. Kiernan, p. 316.

[19] Ibid., p. 317.

[20] See O. Felltham, 'To the reader' in *Resolves: Divine, Moral, Political, The Eighth Impression. With New and several other Additions Both in Prose and Verse Not Extant in Former Impressions* (London: P. Dring, 1661), sig. A2r.

[21] G. Lukács, 'On the nature and form of the essay' in *Soul and Form*, trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), p. 16.

Thinking Now

The temporality of the early English essay, I have suggested, hesitates between an abrupt inauguration with Bacon, a continuous evolution within a longer tradition of moral discourse, and a stuttering proliferation of renewed attempts at a start. These contrasts between suddenness, flow, and intermittency are all also characteristic of the early essay's style. As titles like the anonymous *A Sudden Essay or Subitaneous Conceit* (1648) or Richard Jackson's *Suddain Essay with a Sincere Desire to Vindicate Christianity* (1655) attest, the essay often presented itself as erupting in the moment. Cornwallis declares that 'As Conceits come into my Head I utter them.'[22] Felltham referred to his *Resolves* as '*Excogitations*', implying a process of thinking things through. In a prefatory epistle 'To the Readers', he explains that he uses quotations rather '*as brought in by* Memory, raptim [suddenly], *and* occasional; . . . *especially in* Essay, *which of all writing, is the nearest to a running Discourse*'; he also refers to 'the *running Montaigne*'.[23] For Daniel Tuvill, 'the humour of *Essays* is rather to glance at all things with a running conceit; than to insist on any with a slow discourse'.[24] The essay runs like the flow of unconstrained thought.

In 'Of a Running Head', a short prose 'character' (a form which presented brief character sketches), Richard Flecknoe described this mode of thinking:

> His thoughts are like a swarm of Bees buzzing up and down his head . . . His head is a Leaking Fountain, and would be wholly dry, but for the continual current of his Running Thoughts: . . . the Figures of his Mind are all broken and disjointed, like those of agitated Water, and it is scarcely ever so calm to represent them perfectly.[25]

The running mind, Flecknoe suggests, is a challenge to form. But there is a possible solution: just as 'colours confusedly laid' in painting resolve into sense when 'contracted into some figure by the Art of Perspective', so running thoughts can be captured by the essayist in writing, 'when on Paper, as in a Net he catches his flying thoughts'.[26] Flecknoe figures the

[22] Cornwallis, 'Of fame' in *Essayes*, sig. N5r.
[23] O. Felltham, *Resolves: Diuine, Morall, Politicall* (London: H. Seile, 1628), sigs. A3r, A4r, and p. 183; original italics.
[24] D. Tuvill, 'Of pouerty' in *Essayes Morall and Theologicall* (London: E. Edgar, 1609), p. 226.
[25] R. Flecknoe, *A Collection of the Choicest Epigrams and Characters of Richard Flecknoe: Being Rather a New Work, then a New Impression of the Old*, 2 parts (London: Printed for the author, 1673), part 2 (with separate title page: *Characters, Made at Several Times and on Several Occasions*), p. 2.
[26] Ibid.

essay as a way of catching what Samuel Taylor Coleridge would later call 'the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking'.[27]

For modern critics, the registering of thought in process is often the defining feature of the essay. Ted-Larry Pebworth calls early essayists 'secretaries of their minds in motion'.[28] For Tom Paulin, the essay is 'consciousness in process'.[29] John D'Agata recently declared that what he likes in the essay is 'the feeling that it gives me that it's capturing that activity of human thought in real time'.[30] For early essayists and modern critics both, the most salient aspect of the essay is the impression it gives of direct access to thought as it happens. Leigh Hunt would later devise a subgenre of essay called a 'Now' – a short descriptive piece in which each sentence began with that word.[31] His predecessor in this was Cornwallis, whose opening sentences stress immediacy: 'I come now from discoursing with a husbandman'; 'It befalls me now, to speak of the strangest thing of the world'; 'My custom is about this time of day to sleep, to avoid which now, I choose to write.'[32] His essay 'Of Alehouses' begins: 'I write this in an Alehouse, into which I am driven by night . . . I am without any Company but Ink and Paper, and them I use in stead of talking to my self.'[33] Cornwallis frames the essay as an experimental and spontaneous mode of self-talk.

Of course, such spontaneity is usually an effect, rather than an accurate record of composition. Both Montaigne and Bacon substantially revised their essays over three editions. The second recension of Montaigne's *Essais* (1588) added copiously to the existing chapters, and augmented the two parts of the first edition with a third book of thirteen new pieces. The posthumous edition of 1595 incorporated further manuscript additions. Montaigne did not cancel his previous opinions, so much as incorporate later ideas, prompted by rereading his own writing, thereby confounding their temporality. Peter Mack has shown how Montaigne's expansions work to obscure

[27] S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. A. Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 88. For more on this, see K. Murphy, 'On on: the essay as prepositionality', *ASAP Journal* (16 May 2022), https://asapjournal.com/the-contemporary-essay-on-on-the-essay-as-prepositionality-kathryn-murphy/.

[28] Pebworth, 'Not being, but passing', 18. See also Black, *Of Essays and Reading*, p. 30.

[29] T. Paulin, Introduction to *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays, 1880–1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. xi.

[30] S. Steinberg, 'John D'Agata redefines the essay' (interview with John D'Agata), *Electric Lit* (14 July 2016), https://electricliterature.com/john-dagata-redefines-the-essay/.

[31] See, e.g., L. Hunt, 'A "now," descriptive of a hot day', and 'A "now," descriptive of a cold day', both in *Essays of Leigh Hunt*, ed. R.B. Johnson (London: Dent, 1891), pp. 30 and 35 respectively. I am grateful to Denise Gigante for drawing my attention to these.

[32] Cornwallis, *Essayes*, sigs. I6r, K3r, L1r.

[33] Ibid., sigs. M5v–M6r.

the original sequence of ideas and produce a sense of immediacy. He demonstrates how a straightforward structure of four points in 'Of Lying' (1580) becomes complicated by associative passages until the shifts and sallies of thought seem more 'essayistic'.[34] Montaigne's running wit, apparently unspooling in the instant of writing, is an artefact of afterthought.

The evolution of Bacon's essays also follows a threefold progress: from ten assemblies of abrupt sentences in 1597, to forty revised and expanded *Essaies* in 1612, to the fifty-eight essays or counsels of 1625. Unlike Montaigne, Bacon substantially altered the style and sequence of his essays. The 1597 volume is often described as 'commonplace books writ large', or 'brief groups of aphorisms'.[35] Their 'now' is not the instant of writing, but the timelessness of precept. As a result, Bacon's prose does not run. In the first printing, this particulate form was emphasised by pilcrows which separate his sentences:

> Some have certaine Common places and Themes wherein they are good, and want variety, which kind of poverty is for the most part tedious, and now and then ridiculous. ¶ The honourablest part of talk, is to guide the occasion, and again to moderate & pass to somewhat else. ¶ It is good to vary and mix speech of the present occasion with argument, tales with reasons, asking of questions, with telling of opinions, and jest with earnest.[36]

The essay 'Of Discourse', from which these lines derive, consists of eleven sentences linked in theme. There are no paragraphs, while stops, commas, and pilcrows are the only punctuation. Neil Rhodes has argued that the 1590s were poised between two models of pointing: the traditional *rhetorical punctuation*, which indicates the appropriate place and duration for pauses in speech; and *syntactic* or *logical punctuation*, a new tendency to foreground the text's cognitive structure through distinctions between marks and the relationships they establish between units of thought or expression.[37] Bacon's pilcrows belong to neither category, neither inviting the text's utterance as speech, nor showing logical entailment. Rather, they mark the sutures

[34] P. Mack, 'Rhetoric and the essay', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23:2 (1993), 41–9, here 43–4.

[35] Kiernan, Introduction to Bacon, *Essayes*, ed. Kiernan, p. xix; D.C. Allen, Introduction to W. Cornwallis, *Essayes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946), p. ix. On the essay and commonplacing, see A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3).

[36] F. Bacon, *Essayes. Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion* (London: H. Hooper, 1597), sigs. B2r–v.

[37] N. Rhodes, 'Punctuation as rhetorical notation? From colon to semicolon', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 82:1 (2019), 87–105.

between separate sententiae: possible places for excerption of these commonplaces, or the insertion of others.[38] This is less the secretarial annotation of a mind in motion than a curatorial placement of discrete nuggets of observation. Later in the essay, Bacon refers to 'discourse' as 'good continued speech', but 'Of Discourse' itself is discontinuous.[39] It is not in this sense discourse.

Bacon's closest imitator in this style was Nicholas Breton, whose 1615 *Characters vpon Essaies, Morall and Diuine* was, as we have seen, explicit about its debt to Bacon. The titles of Breton's sixteen pieces are all abstractions: 'Wisdom', 'Learning', 'Love', 'Peace', 'Truth', 'Death'. Each short piece, two to four octavo pages in length, has the same formulaic structure: a series of characterisations of the title separated by colons, followed by a summative sentence, as in these excerpts from 'Time':

> Time is a continual Motion, which from the highest Mover, hath his operation in all the subjects of Nature . . . : He . . . travelleth through the mind, and is visible, but, to the Eye of Understanding : He is swifter than the wind, and yet, as still, as a Stone . . . : . . . He is known to be, but, his being unknown, but only in his being, in a being above knowledge . . . In Sum, . . . : He is the Agent of the Living, and the Register of the dead, the direction of God, and a great Work-master in the world.[40]

Breton separates each thought-unit by a colon, thus constructing an essay of a single saccadic sentence. The full stop is indefinitely postponed by a sequence of clauses, which are themselves syntactically complete and which, since they bear no developing relation to each other, suggest not unfolding thought but the simultaneous present of the aphorism. Breton's colons, like Bacon's pilcrows, are, to use Rhodes's terms, neither syntactic nor rhetorical. Bacon and Breton emphasise the continuity of their subjects, 'Discourse' and 'Time', in ironically discontinuous modes of articulation. They depict not thought, but thoughts.

Continuity and discontinuity are a perennial topic in the study of early modern prose, from Morris Croll's account of the curt and baroque styles to Stuart Farley's more recent excavation of the period's pleasure in what he calls 'mosaic form', texts composed through juxtaposition of discrete parts.[41]

[38] On insertions, see Stewart, 'Birth of the English essay', p. 41.
[39] Bacon, *Essayes* (1597), sig. B3r.
[40] Breton, *Characters*, pp. 34–8.
[41] M. Croll, *'Attic' and Baroque Prose Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); S. Farley, 'Opus musivum, opus variegatum: the mosaic form in early modern culture', *Renaissance Studies*, 31:1 (2017), 107–24.

Breton, and Bacon, in 1597, compiled mosaics. But Bacon's essays changed, and by 1625, 'Of Discourse' had begun to flow:

> Some have certain Common Places, and Themes, wherein they are good, and want Variety: Which kind of Poverty is for the most part Tedious, and when it is once perceived, Ridiculous. The Honourablest Part of Talk, is to give the occasion; And again to Moderate and pass to something else; for then a Man leads the Dance. It is good, in *Discourse*, and Speech of Conversation, to vary, and intermingle Speech, of the present Occasion with Arguments; Tales with Reasons; Asking of Questions, with telling of Opinions; and Jest with Earnest: For it is a dull Thing to Tire, and, as we say now, to Jade, any Thing too far.[42]

Although still staccato, the rhythm is modulated, and variety is not just preached but practised. Rather than striking abrupt aphoristic poses, Bacon's prose leads a dance. His punctuation is syntactic: colons herald explanation; semicolons, a shift of attention; commas, paratactic addition. The inclusion of 'as we say now' addresses an imagined audience and shared experience, turning 'Of Discourse' into essayistic discourse, its sententious precepts embedded in the continuous prose of 'now'.

The early essay thus has two predominant styles, each of which uses the instrument of the sentence and its representation of thought in different ways, and in a different relation to time. On the one hand, there is the running and continuous discourse of thought unfolding; on the other, the aphoristic present and discontinuous mosaic tessellations. These represent not two distinct traditions of the essay, however, but two poles of a fundamental animating problem, neatly encapsulated both stylistically and philosophically by John Hall in his essay 'Of Time'. Hall's opening sentence pursues a paradox of time also raised by Breton: 'The most *precious* thing we can enjoy is time; yet neither is it, nor do we enjoy it; we cannot reinforce a passed minute, nor rely upon a future moment; all we have is that *punctum fluens*, *now*: which is no part at all of it.'[43] Hall reiterates Augustine's famous discussion of time and its 'three parts' (past, present, and future) in the *Confessions*.[44] Rather than attempting to resolve Augustine's paradoxes, however, Hall dramatises thinking about them. His sentence's self-revisions, suspended between semicolons, enact the living thought which is typical of

[42] Bacon, *Essayes*, ed. Kiernan, pp. 103–4.
[43] J. Hall, *Horæ vacivæ, Or, Essays. Some Occasionall Considerations* (London: J. Rothwell, 1646), pp. 14–15.
[44] See Augustine, *Confessions*, book 11, section 14.

the running essay: time is the most precious thing we have; and yet it doesn't exist and so we do not have it. Neither the past nor the future are ours; all we have is *now*, which, it turns out, isn't really time at all, but a '*punctum fluens*', a flowing point. Hall's sentence performs the problems it describes: each clause makes a separate claim about time, but the sentence changes as it flows. It combines the mosaic of Bacon and Breton with the changeable 'now' of Montaigne and Cornwallis. The early essay, like the very question of its origin, is caught between flowing discourse and arrested thought.

Resolving the Early Essay

The early essayists themselves recognised this tension between flow and poise as key to the form of literary prose they were developing. In a famous passage at the beginning of 'Of Repenting', Montaigne outlines the peculiar relation of his writing to time and truth, in terms that anticipate John Hall's *punctum fluens*: 'I describe not the essence, but the passage; not a passage from age to age, or as the people reckon, from seven years to seven, but from day to day, from minute to minute. . . . I may perhaps gainsay my self, but truth . . . I never gainsay [sc. contradict].' Montaigne represents his writing as a moving point of experience, like Hall's *punctum fluens*, inconsistent across time but self-consistent in its testimony to the moment. He continues: 'Were my mind settled, I would not essay, but resolve my self.'[45] Essaying is the opposite of resolution.

The relation of essaying to resolving is central to the early English essay, and to the kinds of thinking it represents. 'Essay' was only one of several names given to short prose pieces in the early seventeenth century: others include the vow, the resolve, the discourse, the meditation, the observation, and the counsel. Among these, resolves were among the most popular, though they did not outlast the seventeenth century.[46] Unlike the essay,

[45] Montaigne, *Essayes*, trans. J. Florio, p. 483. The French: 'Je ne peints pas l'estre. Je peints le passage: non un passage d'aage en autre, ou, comme dict le peuple, de sept en sept ans, mais de jour en jour, de minute en minute . . . . je me contredits bien à l'adventure, mais la verité, . . . je ne la contredy point. Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m'essaierois pas, je me resoudrois[.]' These lines ground Pebworth's definition of the 'true' essay: 'Not being, but passing'.

[46] As Richard F. Kennedy observed in 1967, the word 'resolve' does not appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a kind of writing, despite the proliferation in the early seventeenth century. See R. Kennedy (ed.), 'A critical edition of the second century (1628) of the *Resolves* of Owen Fellltham with an introduction and commentary', unpublished BLitt thesis, University of Oxford (1967), p. xiii. Fellltham's *Resolves* were first published in 1623, with a new series in 1628, and a combined and revised final edition in 1661. Other works in the

the resolve had a typical structure: it assembled a sequence of thoughts, ideas, and aphorisms on a particular subject, turning in closing to assertions that pledged the writer to a change in behaviour or state of mind. Owen Fellltham's *Resolves* of 1628, the paradigm of the genre, start with a page or two of well-wrought writing on the titular topic, dense with allusion, image, and aphorism, before closing with assertions in the first person. 'Of our Sense of Absent Good', for example, ends with a resolution for the now: 'I will apply myself to the *present*; to *preserve* it; to *enjoy* it. But, never be *passionate* for the loss of *that*, which I cannot *keep*; nor can *regain*.'[47] The first pages involve deliberation, exploration, and suspension of decision; the final sentences end the suspense. The resolve *essays*, before resolving.

This tension between thinking and deciding not only inhered in the structure of early essays and resolves, but was also addressed as a topic in itself. Fellltham portrayed an ideal state of mind which knows both how to deliberate, and how deliberation should end. '*Contemplation* generates, *Action* propagates', he writes in 'Of the Worship of Admiration': 'Without the first, the latter is *defective*. Without the last, the first is but *abortive*, and *embryous* . . . I will neither always be *busy*, and *doing*: nor ever *shut up* in nothing but *thoughts*.'[48] The resolve navigated between these poles. Joseph Hall, the form's forerunner, began his penultimate meditation by rejecting 'An inconstant & wavering mind', because 'it makes a man ridiculous . . . For a rolling stone gathers no moss; and the mind whilst it would be every thing, proves nothing . . . It is the safest course for a man's profit, credit, and ease, to deliberate long, to resolve surely, hardly to alter.'[49] The resolve allows the flow of deliberation to happen, but ultimately delivers the mind from endless rumination. While Montaigne claimed irresolution as the essay's proper terrain, his phrase 'I would not essay, but resolve my self' suggests that his form of essaying occurs in awareness of the resolution it postpones or refuses.

tradition include A. Stafford, *Meditations, and Resolutions: Moral, Divine, Politicall* (London: T. Saunders, 1612); T. Tuke, *New Essayes: Meditations, and Vows, including in them the chiefe duties of a Christian, both for the faith, and manners* (London: N. Okes, 1614); and R. Brathwait, *Essaies vpon the fiue Senses with a pithie one vpon detraction . . . With sundry Christian Resolues* (London: G. Whittaker, 1620). On Fellltham, see A. De Gooyer, '"Read all, and use thy mind's liberty": the *Resolves* of Owen Fellltham', *Prose Studies*, 20:2 (1997), 18–41; and T.L. Pebworth, *Owen Fellltham* (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

[47] Fellltham, *Resolves* (1628), p. 80; original italics.

[48] Ibid., p. 44; original italics.

[49] J. Hall, *Meditations and Vowes, Divine and Morall* (London: S. Macham & L. Lisle, 1609), pp. 227–9.

Cornwallis's first essay was entitled 'Of Resolution', and in it Cornwallis complains that the worst state to endure is 'unsettled opinion' vexed by 'continual alteration'. Endless essaying is unbearable. In his earlier life, he tells us, 'I . . . contradicted my self', like Montaigne in 'Of Repenting', and was 'interred in the mire of Irresolution'. 'So much have I hated this giddy unconstantness', he writes, that he preferred even 'dirty resolutions' over vacillation; 'at last', however, 'I found my self'.[50] Fellltham agrees that irresolution is the enemy of selfhood, in the lovely first sentence of his own 'Of Resolution': 'What a *skein* of ruffled *silk* is the *uncomposed Man?*': 'Every *thing* that but offers to even *him*, entangles *him* more, as if, while you unbend *him* one way, *he* warpeth worse the other.'[51] A man without composition, unresolved, is thread entangled on its bobbin. Prolonged essaying produces a fankle; the resolve attempts disentanglement.

It is fitting, then, that for Cornwallis, as an essayist, resolution is temporary. 'Me thinks I am strong, and able to encounter any affection', he writes, in terms which recall his characterisation of the 'false' essays of Montaigne and others as 'strong, and able to endure the sharpest trial'. But there he cannot stop: 'hardly have my thoughts made an end of this gallant discourse, but in comes a wife, or a friend, at whose sight my Armour of defence is broken, and I could weep with them, or be content to laugh at their trivial sports'.[52] Discourse ends, only to be set running again by circumstance. As Fellltham writes at the end of his first book of *Resolves*, 'Resolutions may often change.'[53] The end of each essay invites a new beginning.

That Bacon understood this, despite his didactic style, is evident in the structure of the 1625 *Essayes*, which begin in a spin: '*What is Truth*; said jesting *Pilate*; And would not stay for an Answer.'[54] Pilate's turn on his heel is swiftly followed by remarks on 'certain discoursing Wits' who 'delight in Giddiness', and 'count it a Bondage, to fix a Belief' – in other words, those who refuse to resolve.[55] That Montaigne is quoted later in 'Of Truth', newly written for the 1625 volume, confirms that Bacon was gesturing to the fashionable essaying vein in which he was himself, ambivalently, writing. The volume ends with Bacon still thinking of giddiness, in another new essay, 'Of Vicissitude of Things', which suggests that 'Matter is in a Perpetual Flux, and never at a Stay'; its penultimate sentence picks up the giddiness of

[50] Cornwallis, *Essayes*, sigs. B1r–B2r.
[51] Fellltham, *Resolves*, p. 4.
[52] Cornwallis, *Essayes*, sigs. B2r–B2v.
[53] Fellltham, *Resolves: Diuine, Morall, Politicall* (London: H. Seile, 1623), p. 326.
[54] Bacon, *Essayes*, ed. Kiernan, p. 7.
[55] Ibid.

the opening: 'it is not good to look too long upon these turning Wheels of Vicissitude, lest we become Giddy'.[56] At the end of his *Essayes or Counsels*, Bacon suggests it is time for resolution. Counsels are, after all, a way of thinking through a problem on behalf of another, and providing them with the tools for decisive action.[57] If Bacon's opening sentences of the volume turn, like Pilate, away from the eternal verity of metaphysical truth to the changeable world and the possibility of action within it, his closing sentences suggest that the reader turn away from such 'giddy unconstantness', in Cornwallis's phrase, as the volume comes to an end.

Bacon's final framing of his essays suggests that he recognised what this chapter has argued: that the early English essay oscillates between motives of essaying and resolving, between the giddy pursuit of thought in the moment, and the desire for a stay and resolution. The essay is a form surprised into itself, born of an accident of name which invites its practitioners to explore the metaphorical potential of the tentative, probative, and sketchy word 'essay'. Despite the difficulty of fixing a beginning for the English essay, despite its openness to revision and second thoughts, despite manifest differences of style – flowing or aphoristic, curt or prolix, spontaneous or lapidary – those who called their writings 'essays' did have a common sense of what it was they were doing: writing in the right mode for thinking, and postponing resolution.

[56] Ibid., pp. 172, 176.

[57] See J. Paul, *Counsel and Command in Early Modern Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 110–21, for an illuminating discussion of counsel and its relation to Montaigne, Bacon, and Cornwallis.

3

Miscellanies, Commonplace Books, and the Essay

ANGUS VINE

In 1665, Ralph Johnson, vicar of Brignall near Greta Bridge in North Yorkshire and master of the parish school in that town, published a compendious guide to grammar-school education. Amongst rules for spelling, pointing, and parsing, and instructions in a whole range of literary compositions, he included a notable definition of the essay: 'An essay is a short discourse about any virtue, vice, or other common-place. Such be learning, ignorance, justice, temperance, fortitude, prudence, drunkenness, usury, love, joy, fear, hope, sorrow, anger, covetousness, contentment, labour, idleness, riches, poverty, pride, humility, virginity, &c.'[1] He then issued six 'Rules for making' essays, a prescription that reduced a notoriously difficult-to-define genre to a schematic form with a replicable structure and recognisable figures of speech. The essay, identified by one modern scholar by its impulse to 'wander at will', was in Johnson's hands reduced to a clearly delimited schoolboy exercise.[2] But if Johnson's formula curtailed much of the freedom that subsequent readers have come to admire about early essay writing, it also recognised the form's essential connection with humanist education and humanist methods of reading and writing. The essay in the seventeenth century was fundamentally a 'common-place' form. Essays were made from commonplace books in both a literal and a conceptual sense. Johnson's formula may be reductive, but it captured exactly the essay's topical and rhetorical origins.

As a number of recent scholars have noted, the essay emerged as a product, and 'offshoot and extension', of the humanist commonplace

[1] R. Johnson, *The Scholars Guide from the Accidence to the University* (London: T. Pierrepont, 1665), sig. C1r–v; spelling and capitalisation have been modernised for ease of reading, here and in other early texts where indicated.

[2] T.L. Pebworth, 'Not being, but passing: defining the early English essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 10:2 (1977), 18. On the schoolboy theme as essay, see T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme' in this volume (Ch. 20).

tradition.[3] Some of the earliest essays are, as a result, little more than collections of citations and extracts loosely knitted together by a common subject matter or theme. The early essayist has, therefore, justly been characterised as a 'citation-happy bibliophile'.[4] Commonplace books were a cornerstone of humanist education and an essential part of scholarly life in the early modern world.[5] Pedagogues from the early sixteenth century onwards instructed students to keep a notebook at hand in which they were to write down notable things and expressions when they came across them in the course of their reading. These notes (the commonplaces) would then be organised under topical headings that the students had previously recorded. Desiderius Erasmus was perhaps the best-known advocate of this method. In his work *De ratione studii* (1512), he argued that every student 'should have at the ready some commonplace book of systems and topics, so that wherever something noteworthy occurs he may write it down in the appropriate column'.[6] The method was anticipatory and generative: the commonplace book was intended not as a passive repository of knowledge, but as an active and expansive collection that would provide its owner with the *copia* needed for future discourse. For pedagogues, the purpose of these books, as the Spanish humanist Juan Luís Vives explained in his own guide to the practice, was mastery of Latin style.[7] It is hardly surprising, therefore, that early

[3] A. Blair, 'Note taking as an art of transmission', *Critical Inquiry*, 31:1 (2004), 101; S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 2–3; T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 11–13.

[4] J. Scodel, 'The early English essay' in R. DeMaria, Jr., H. Chang, and S. Zacher (eds.), *A Companion to British Literature*, Vol. 2: *Early Modern Literature, 1450–1660* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 224. For more on the relation between books and the essay, see D. Gigante's 'On books: the bibliographical essay' in this volume (Ch. 15).

[5] Important studies of commonplace culture include J.M. Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces: An Historical Investigation of the General and Universal Ideas in All Argumentation and Persuasion with Special Emphasis on the Educational and Literary Tradition of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974); A. Blair, 'Humanist methods in natural philosophy: the commonplace book', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53:4 (1992), 541–51; P. Beal, 'Notions in garrison: the seventeenth-century commonplace book' in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993), pp. 131–47; A. Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and E. Havens, *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 2001).

[6] D. Erasmus, *De ratione studii* in C.R. Thompson (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 24: *Literary and Educational Writings 2*, trans. B.I. Knott and B. McGregor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 672.

[7] J.L. Vives, *Epistolae duae de ratione studij puerilis* (Bruges: Hubertus de Crooc, 1526), sigs. S3v–S4r.

essayists schooled in the same pedagogical tradition also turned to this method to generate the similarly copious extracts so characteristic of their own anticipatory style of writing.

Another, and equally important, influence on the early essay was the long tradition of miscellaneous writing that reached back to classical antiquity, and which overlapped with, but was also distinct from, commonplace culture.[8] Works such as Aulus Gellius's second-century CE antiquarian miscellany *Noctes Atticae*, and later imitations such as Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (written in the early fifth century), were the most important precedents here. Gellius's *Noctes* consists of brief and heterogeneous notes on an enormous, often bewildering range of topics. Book 1 alone ranges across mathematics, moral philosophy, natural philosophy, poetry, philology, life writing, and history: its contents include a calculation of the height of Hercules, reminiscences of Gellius's student days in Attica, discussions of Stoicism, an investigation of the Roman antiquary Marcus Terentius Varro's language in his major work *Antiquitates rerum humanarum et divinarum*, tales from the days of the Roman Republic, and reflections on the epitaphs of famous Roman poets, including Plautus, Gnaeus Naevius, and Marcus Pacuvius. Gellius, in this way, provided a model not only for the essayists' typically loose and meandering style, but also for their characteristically wide-ranging interests. Moreover, he modelled a literary form that was at once synthetic and amorphous, capacious and compendious – the effects that collections of essays also commonly sought to achieve.

Gellius's notes combine extracts, anecdotes, commentaries, experiences, and reflections. Fragmentary and non-sequential, they make, as one modern commentator has observed, 'no pretensions to completeness', but offer instead 'isolated facts and self-contained discussions that should retain the reader's interest by brevity and variety'.[9] As Gellius explained in his preface, he sought to include only such entries as 'might lead active and alert minds to a desire for independent learning and to the study of the useful arts, or would save those who are already fully occupied with the other duties of life from an ignorance of words and things which is assuredly shameful and boorish'.[10]

[8] For this influence, see also W. Boutcher, 'The Montaignian essay and authored miscellanies from antiquity to the nineteenth century' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, pp. 55–77.

[9] L. Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 21.

[10] A. Gellius, *Attic Nights*, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (London: W. Heinemann, 1927), vol. 1, p. xxxi (Praefatio, 12).

The purpose of the work, he explained, was to pique curiosity, encourage reflection, promote further inquiry, prompt sharper minds, and perfect literary style. The early essay, this chapter proposes, had largely the same qualities and many of the same aims.

Recognising the importance of these two influences, and the extent to which the early essay was enmeshed in both, discloses two of the essay's defining characteristics. The first of these was the importance of copiousness and the essayist's insatiable instinct to collect, compile, gather, and record. This produced what is perhaps the most striking component of the form in its late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manifestations: the sheer number of citations, extracts, and experiences from which early examples were knitted together. The second was the essay's heterogeneous and anti-systematic nature. Essays shared the central paradox of books such as the *Noctes Atticae*: the idea that textual collections defined by their heterogeneity and apparent lack of order nonetheless had considerable formal significance for readers and writers alike.[11] The miscellany (in both print and manuscript) was a signature textual form here; but so, too, was the essay.

Humanist Commonplace Culture

Commonplace books and miscellanies helped to generate essays, as their contents provided essayists with much of their raw material, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the publication of a number of examples, which served as major reference works and became bestsellers across Europe. Important (and much reprinted) examples include Angelo Poliziano's *Miscellanea* (1489), Erasmus's *Adagia* (1500), Domenico Nani Mirabelli's *Polyanthea* (1503), Caelius Rhodiginus's *Lectiones antiquae* (1516), Conrad Gesner's *Pandectae* (1548), and Theodor Zwinger's *Theatrum vitae humanae* (1565).[12] These works promised their readers variety in both *res* (things) and *verba* (words); their methods also modelled the practices of notation that made the collection of such varied material possible in the first

[11] See, further, J.M. Mandosio, 'La miscellanée: histoire d'un genre' in D. de Courcelles (ed.), *Ouvrages miscellanées et théories de la connaissance à la Renaissance* (Paris: École des Chartes, 2003), pp. 7–36; P. Bullard, 'Digital editing and the eighteenth-century text: works, archives, and miscellanies', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 36:3 (2012), 57–80; and A. Vine, *Miscellaneous Order: Manuscript Culture and the Early Modern Organization of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[12] For these works, see A. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 126–32.

place. Essayists from Montaigne onwards commonly drew on their resources and imitated their methods in their own miscellaneous reading and writing.

Moreover, and perhaps surprisingly to modern readers, the resulting combination of copiousness and citation is what made the essay for so many writers a compelling vehicle for self-expression and subjectivity. The act of assemblage necessitated selection, judgment, and invention: choices about what citations to include, how they should be used, and where they should be put. In short, it necessitated a form of literary taste. These choices were, in turn, what ensured that the best essays were more than just hodgepodge collections or literary gallimaufries. The reflections of some of the most notable early essayists on their own literary techniques, their methods of reading, and their compilatory habits show that in practice.

In the prefatory epistle to his 1603 translation of Montaigne's *Essais* (1580, 1588, 1595), John Florio firmly grounded the essay as a literary form in the humanist imitative tradition. Florio's argument here serves, first of all, as a defence of translation as a cultural practice, but it also becomes an apology for the essay form itself. Translation, Florio suggests, should be understood not as a literal rendering of a text from one language to another, but as an act of rewriting. The same, he implies, goes for the essay. Quoting, but also quoting selectively, the Latin dictum *translata proficit arbos* ('a tree makes progress when transplanted'), which he abbreviates to make his point, Florio asseverates:

> And therefore willingly I take his word, though wittingly I do mistake it, *Translata proficit*. Why but who ever did well in it? Nay, who did ever well without it? If nothing can be now said, but has been said before (as he said well) if there be no new thing under the sun. What is that that has been? That that shall be: (as he said that was wisest) What do the best then, but glean after others' harvest? Borrow their colours, inherit their possessions? What do they but translate? Perhaps, usurp? At least, collect? If with acknowledgement, it is well; if by stealth, it is too bad: in this, our conscience is our accuser; posterity our judge: in that our study is our advocate, and you readers our jury.[13]

Translata proficit is an adaptation of a motto that Florio could have lifted from various sources, including Paolo Giovio's *Imprese* (1561) and Torquato

[13] J. Florio, 'To the curteous reader' in M. Montaigne, *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. J. Florio (London: E. Blount, 1603), sig. A5r–v; text has been modernised.

Tasso's *Rime* (1567–93).[14] The passage as a whole is, of course, mimetic of the method of humanist imitation that Florio seeks to defend. He combines the arboreal motto with the much more familiar biblical commonplace that there is nothing new under the sun (taken from Ecclesiastes) to provide a powerful illustration in microcosm of the kind of textual culture that the *Essais* embody and to uphold the value of translation as an inventive literary practice.[15] Florio himself, in other words, gleans, borrows, and collects the words of others to make his point. Moreover, by the end of the preface, when he has also provided a definition of the essay, the broader significance of his remarks is apparent: 'Why but essays are but men's school-themes pieced together; you might as well say, several texts. All is in the choice and handling.'[16] The remarks apply, that is to say, as much to the art of the essayist as to the craft of the translator. The implication, too, is that translation itself is an essayistic pursuit.

Florio here was almost certainly responding to Montaigne's own remarks on borrowing and invention in his essay 'Of Bookes'. Montaigne muses in that essay on methods of reading and writing, describes his note-taking practices, examines his literary preferences, and acknowledges the extent to which his essays more generally depend on 'borrowings' from others.[17] He begins by inviting the reader to reflect on the purpose and significance of these citations:

> Let that which I borrow be surveyed, and then tell me whether I have made good choice of ornaments, to beautify and set forth the invention, which ever comes from me. For, I make others to relate (not after mine own fantasy, but as it best fall out) what I can not so well express, either through unskill of language, or want of judgement.[18]

[14] P. Giovio, *Le sententiose imprese di Monsignor Pavlo Giovio, et del signor Gabriel Symeoni, ridotte in rima per il detto Symeoni* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1561), p. 132; A. Casu, '"Translata proficit arbos": Le imprese "eteree" nelle *Rime* del Tasso', *Italique*, 2 (1999), 81–111; O.A. Zaharia, '*Translata proficit*: revisiting John Florio's translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Les Essais*', *Sederi*, 22 (2012), 115–36.

[15] Cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9: 'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun' (KJV).

[16] Florio, 'To the curteous reader', sig. A5v.

[17] For detailed analysis of these 'borrowings' and their importance for the genesis of the *Essais*, see F. Goyet, 'A propos de "ces pastissages de lieux communs" (le role des notes de lecture dans la genèse des *Essais*) (première partie)', *Bulletin de la Société des amis de Montaigne*, 5–6 (1986), 11–26; and 'A propos de "ces pastissages de lieux communs" (le role des notes de lecture dans la genèse des *Essais*) (seconde partie)', *Bulletin de la Société des amis de Montaigne*, 7–8 (1987), 9–30.

[18] M. Montaigne, 'Of bookes' in Montaigne, *Essayes*, sig. X4v.

What matters in writing, Montaigne argues here, is *inventio*, the central canon of classical rhetoric: this is what ensures that a form such as the essay, stuffed full of citations and 'borrowings', nonetheless 'ever comes from mee'. The complexity, inconsistency, and evasiveness of the self, moreover, makes the sheer number of 'borrowings', so characteristic of his and other early essays, inevitable. The same might be said for his miscellaneous, tentative, and digressive style.[19] 'I number not my borrowings, but I weigh them', he goes on, 'And if I would have made their number to prevail, I would have had twice as many.'[20]

The remainder of the essay combines a discussion of various authors with a description of Montaigne's own note-taking technique. He commends Plutarch and Seneca, for example, for their axiomatic, sententious, and easy-to-extract style, and also for their shortness: 'Both have this excellent commodity for my humour, that whosoever read them is not tied to plod long upon them, whereof I am uncapable.'[21] Their terse style, of course, lends itself to the commonplace approach, and both are amongst the most widely cited authors in commonplace books from the period. However, the style of notation that Montaigne proceeds to describe suggests that his own way of reading was more idiosyncratic, more dynamic, and more clearly fixed on judgment.[22] Many times, he admits, he alighted upon books in his library, which he 'supposed to be new, and never to have read', only to find them 'all bescribbled with my notes'. He, therefore, devised an annotative practice that would make this kind of forgetfulness impossible: 'I have a while since, accustomed my self, to note at the end of my book (I mean such as I purpose to read but once) the time I made an end to read it, and to set down what censure or judgement I gave of it.'[23] The intention was that, at a later date, those notes would then 'represent unto my mind, the air and general idea, I had conceived of the author in reading him.'[24] Having described his method, Montaigne then gives a taste of it in practice, setting down 'the copy of some of mine annotations' in three of his favourite books:

[19] A. Wells, 'The great self-examiner', *Slightly Foxed*, 69 (2011), 84, https://foxedquarterly.com/anthony-wells-michel-de-montaigne-essays-literary-review/ (accessed 14 August 2023).

[20] Montaigne, 'Of bookes', sig. X4v.

[21] Ibid., sig. X5v.

[22] F. Goyet, 'The word "commonplaces" in Montaigne' in L. Hunter (ed.), *Towards a Definition of a Topos: Approaches to Analogical Reasoning* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 66–77. For a meticulous study of Montaigne's method of reading, see A. Tournon, *Montaigne: la glose et l'essai: Edition revue et corrigée précédée d'un Réexamen* (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 2000).

[23] Montaigne, 'Of bookes', sig. Y1v.

[24] Ibid.

Francesco Guicciardini's *La historia d'Italia* (1561), Philippe de Commynes's *Mémoires* (first published in 1524), and Martin Du Bellay's *Mémoires* (1569).[25]

William Cornwallis, perhaps Montaigne's closest English imitator, similarly emphasised the importance of judgment and invention in his own reflexive essay on the essayist's art ('Of Essayes, & Bookes').[26] Opening with the modesty characteristic of his essay collection as a whole, Cornwallis begins by emphasising the preliminary nature of his own essay writing and its trial, or 'prentice', form. He underscores this with a series of inventive, tentative, and unexpected analogies:

> I hold neither Plutarch's, nor none of these ancient short manner of writings, nor Montaigne's, nor such of this latter time to be rightly termed essays, for though they be short, yet they are strong, and able to endure the sharpest trial: but mine are essays, who am newly bound prentice to the inquisition of knowledge, and use these papers as a painter's boy a board, that is trying to bring his hand and his fancy acquainted. It is a manner of writing well befitting undigested motions, or a head not knowing his strength like a circumspect runner trying for a start, or providence that tastes before she buys.[27]

A further analogy then follows: Cornwallis also describes the essay as being 'like a scrivener trying his pen before he engross his work'. His analogies stand in stark contrast to the piquant observation about essays that he makes next:

> for the most that I have yet touched, have millions of words to the bringing forth one reason, and when a reason is gotten, there is such borrowing it one of another, that in a multitude of books, still that conceit, or some issued out of that appears so belaboured, and worn, as in the end it is good for nothing but for a proverb.[28]

Cornwallis's point is essentially the same as Florio's, that the essayist inevitably rehearses both the ideas and the words of other writers: the essayist trades in commonplaces. The essay itself is, therefore, perforce built from

[25] For Montaigne's reading of these three authors, see J.H. Whitfield, 'Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Montaigne', *Italian Studies*, 28:1 (1973), 31–47; M. Tetel, 'Montaigne's glances at Philippe de Commynes', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 60:1 (1998), 25–39; and B. Fontana, *Montaigne's Politics: Authority and Governance in the Essais* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 47–57.

[26] On Cornwallis as the originator of the English essay tradition, see K. Murphy's 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' in this volume (Ch. 2).

[27] W. Cornwallis, 'Of essayes, & bookes' in *Essayes* (London: E. Mattes, 1600–1), sig. 2G8v; text modernised.

[28] Ibid., sig. 2H1r.

other essays and other books. But for Cornwallis, that was not necessarily a weakness. The essay, he suggests, is a first step in the acquisition of learning; the essay, that is to say, is an exploratory sketch to a more accomplished work (of history, philosophy, and so forth). The implication, therefore, is that the writer should use the form in the same way that the painter uses a board and the scrivener wastepaper. Moreover, he also suggests that, with judgment, the skilful essayist can mix familiar words and ideas to produce something at once resemblant and new – the very effect that his own inventive images achieve.

The danger, however, was that, in unskilled or idle hands, this method of composition could produce the kind of logorrhoea – a million 'belaboured' words – that was the very opposite of properly copious or inventive discourse. Cornwallis, in this way, registers the same concerns about commonplace culture that Francis Bacon would voice much more famously a few years later. Bacon, too, was ambivalent about commonplacing. We know that he admired the practice, that he recognised its importance for generating *copia*, that he kept commonplace books of his own, and that some of his works at least depended on the resources of those books. Yet he also repeatedly argued for the necessity of its reform. In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), for example, he praised commonplacing as 'a matter of great use and essence in studying; as that which assures copy of invention, and contracts judgment to a strength', but he also lamented all existing methods: 'there is none of any sufficient worth, all of them carrying merely the face of a *School*, and not of a *World*'.[29] Cornwallis's essay is a study in the same point: he acknowledges the potential of humanist commonplace culture to generate matter and words alike, and recognises his own dependence upon it, but he also apprehends its limitations, and its potential to generate wordiness rather than persuasive arguments or genuinely eloquent discourse. 'To know the names of things without the things', he pronounces, 'is unprofitable, as a power to repeat the alphabet by a fellow altogether illiterate.'[30] His own aim in the *Essayes* is, therefore, 'to speak, rather than to make signs, and to be careful of joining of the nominative case to the verb'. However, his purpose was also to avoid pedantry and schoolroom verbiage: 'to be prentice to *tonus* and *sonus* for a life time', he adds, 'is as needless as to make new clothes

[29] F. Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 118 (sig. 2P2r). Bacon's word 'copy' here is the English translation of *copia* and he used it in its customary rhetorical sense to mean abundance or richness of language (see *OED*, *s.v.* 'copy', *n.* i.1,[c]).

[30] Cornwallis, 'Of essayes, & bookes', sig. 2I5v.

when one lies a dying, for words are but clothes, matters substance'.[31] His aim, in other words, was the *inventio* that Montaigne also sought to achieve, where richness of language was matched by abundance of ideas.

Miscellanies and Commonplaces

As the seventeenth century progressed, the connections between essays, commonplace books, and miscellanies that Cornwallis and Montaigne highlighted remained every bit as important. Essayists continued to rely on commonplace and miscellany models for the varied citations and subjects that were their stock-in-trade. The essayistic endeavours of Joshua Baildon, a translator and miscellanist from Barn Elms in Surrey, and scion of a prominent Yorkshire family, are a case in point. Baildon is today an almost entirely forgotten literary figure.[32] In the 1650s and 1660s, however, he had a brief period of efflorescence, producing translations of Spanish, Italian, and French books, and completing a long manuscript miscellany of his own. His most notable work was *The Rarities of the World* (1651), an adaptation of the Spanish writer and humanist Pedro Mexía's *La silva di varia lección* (1540), one of the most popular of all sixteenth-century miscellanies. As Baildon explained in his preface, his adaptation was, in fact, based on a French intermediary ('a book, *Petrus Messia*, translated into French'), which his friend and kinsman, Paul Holdenby, had brought back from France and had given him 'twenty years since'.[33] This was almost certainly one of the many editions of Claude Gruget's translation of the *Silva*, a book first published at Lyon in 1552, where it was issued under the title *Les diverses leçons de Pierre Messie*. Gruget's translation was then frequently reprinted and circulated widely: we know, for example, that Montaigne encountered Mexía in this version.[34]

Baildon's English adaptation consists of thirty-four chapters on a range of historical, antiquarian, natural philosophical, contemplative, and devotional topics. His subjects include the length of life in the antediluvian world, the

[31] Ibid. By 'prentice to *tonus* and *sonus*', Cornwallis meant the kind of slavish attention to tone and sound, and to grammar more generally, sometimes associated with the schoolroom.

[32] For the only account of his life, which contains a brief description of his literary activities, see W.P. Baildon, *Baildon and the Baildons*, 3 vols. (Bradford: Privately printed for the author, 1912–27), vol. 3, pp. 137–42; text modernised.

[33] P. Mexía, *The Rarities of the World*, trans. J. B[aildon] Gent. (London: B. Alsop, 1651), sig. A2r.

[34] P. Mack, *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 24.

use of the sign of the cross in pre-Christian culture, the importance of keeping counsel, the ancient Egyptians' understanding of the heart, the power of the imagination, ancient marriage customs, the 'properties' of the viper, tarantulas and how to cure their bites 'by the sound of music', the 'secrets' of snow, the mysteries of sleep, and the nature of religious faith.[35] The subjects, then, are heterogeneous, and the chapters are miscellaneous in matter and parts. The style, moreover, is recognisably that of the essayist: Baildon is sententious, axiomatic, citational, discursive, and digressive. The first chapter, for example, entitled 'Why men lived longer in former ages, than now in these days', begins as a discussion of disease in the postdiluvian world, becomes an argument for temperance, and ends up as a defence of divine providence.[36] It mixes biblical and classical sources, observation, and opinion. Baildon begins with an axiomatic pronouncement on the length of life and the sin that led to the Noachian Flood: 'All those that are studious in divine writ may read, that in the time of the first age and before that for sin a general deluge came over the earth, man's life then was longer than it is at this present.'[37] He then ends with a reassertion of the 'goodness of God' and the Lord's great mercy.

The fourth chapter, 'Of the Excellency of Keeping Counsel, and How it Ought to be Kept, with Some Good Examples to that Purpose', is perhaps the most essayistic section in the book. Again, the chapter begins axiomatically: 'One of the principal things which makes a man known to be wise, is that he can keep counsel, and be secret in that which hath been declared unto him by another, and to keep his own proper affairs silent.'[38] The chapter then consists of a series of loosely connected historical examples to illustrate this, including 'a pleasant discourse' recounted by both Gellius and Macrobius to illustrate the 'shame' of those 'which have by and by discovered those secrets which they ought to have concealed'. This 'discourse' is the tale of Papirius, a young boy who was brought into the Roman Senate one day with his father, and was later badgered by his mother to reveal what had been discussed there, but thanks to his quick wit and 'constancy' was able to keep that hidden from her.[39] Having recounted the tale, Baildon then added his own wry judgment: 'the old men in these times may take example by this discreet

[35] Mexía, *The Rarities of the World*, sigs. B1r–B2v, B4v–C2r, C2r–D1r, D3r–D4r, I2r–I3v, K3r–K4v, O4r–P1v, P1v–P2r, P4v–Q1v, R1r–R3r, and S3v–S4v.
[36] Ibid., sigs. B1r–B2v. [37] Ibid., sig. B1r. [38] Ibid., sig. C2r.
[39] Gellius, *Attic Nights*, 1.23; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, trans. R. A. Kaster, Loeb Classical Library, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), vol. 3, 1.6.18–25.

youth, and consider, that if a private secret ought to be kept, much more a public, and especially among people of age and judgement'.[40]

As well as adapting the *Silva*, Baildon was a miscellanist in his own right. His other major endeavour was a calligraphic florilegium (a collection of literary 'flowers' or texts), which he titled *Flowers Divine and Humane Serving to Adorn Discourse, Maintain Argument, Beautify Speech and Writing, and to make a Man Live Happily, and Die Blessedly* (Fig. 3.1).[41]

This collection comprises loosely connected moral and devotional commonplaces, which Baildon copied from multiple printed sources and entered under topical headings in humanist pedagogical fashion. He then mixed these citations to produce what is, in effect, a series of short aphoristic discourses in the vein of Bacon's early essays. Taking his cue from Montaigne, Baildon collected these 'flowers', as his title explains, not only to speak and argue well, but also to live and die well – in his own words, to live happily, and die blessedly.[42] His essay on 'Revenge', whose topic may have been suggested by Bacon's essay on the same subject, typifies his method. The essay splices two sections from Joseph Hall's *Meditations* (1605), one of the most widely cited sources in the whole of *Flowers*, to create an original text of its own. The first of these is Hall's fifty-fifth meditation; the second is his ninety-eighth meditation. In both instances, Baildon copied the text almost verbatim, but then amended it to turn a first-person meditation into second-person precepts and instructions.[43] His essay, in short, is made from commonplaces, but it is also more than just a rehearsal of them.

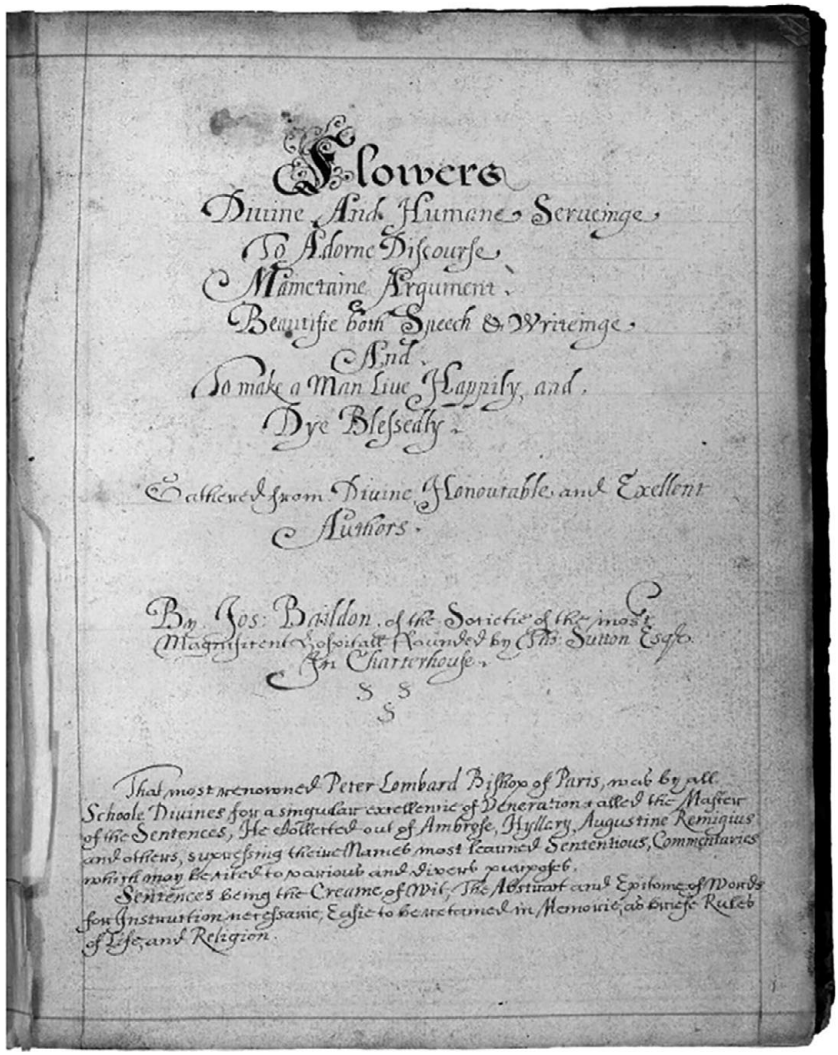
Eight years after the publication of *The Rarities of the World*, a volume appeared that further elided the distinctions between essays and miscellanies, and which today is a much more familiar landmark in the history of the essay as a form. That volume was Francis Osborne's *A Miscellany of Sundry Essayes, Paradoxes, and Problematicall Discourses, Letters and Characters; Together with Politicall Deductions from the History of the Earl of Essex, Executed Under Queen Elizabeth* (1659). The table of contents suggests that Osborne (or, at least, his printer and publisher John

[40] Mexía, *The Rarities of the World*, sig. C3r–v.

[41] J. Baildon, *Flowers Diuine and Humane Serueinge to Adorne Discourse Mainetaine Argument Beautifie Speech & Writeinge and to Make a Man Liue Happily, and Dye Blessedly*, Folger Shakespeare Library (MS V.a.134).

[42] Cf. Montaigne, 'Of bookes': 'if I study, I only endeavour to find out the knowledge that teaches or handles the knowledge of my self, and which may instruct me how to die well, and how to live well' (sig. X4v).

[43] J. Hall, *Meditations and Vowes, Diuine and Morall. Seruing for Direction in Christian and Ciuill Practise* (London: J. Porter, 1605), sigs. C11r–v and F2v–F3r; Baildon, *Flowers Diuine and Humane*, p. 35.


Flowers
Diuine And Humane Seruenge
To Adorne Discourse
Maintaine Argument
Beautifie both Speech & Writeinge
And
To make a Man Liue Happily, and
Dye Blessedly.

Gathered from Diuine Honourable and Excellent
Authors.

By Jos: Baildon, of the Societie of the most
Magnificent Hospitall Founded by Sir Tho: Sutton Esqr.
in Charterhouse.

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That most renowned Peter Lombard Bishop of Paris, made by all
Schoole Diuines for a singular excellencie of Veneration called the Master
of the Sentences, He collected out of Ambrose, Hyllary, Augustine Remigius
and others, sixe hundred of their Names most learned Sententious, Commentaries
which may be stiled to various and diverse purposes.
Sentences being the Creame of Wit, The Abstract and Epitome of Words
for Instruction necessarie, Easie to be retained in Memorie, as briefe Rules
of Life, and Religion.

Figure 3.1. Joshua Baildon, Title page to *Flowers Diuine and Humane Serueinge to Adorne Discourse Mainetaine Argument Beautifie Speech & Writeinge and to Make a Man Liue Happily, and Dye Blessedly*. Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.134.

Grismond) identified four of its items explicitly as essays: (1) 'An Essay on such as condemn all they understand not a reason for'; (2) 'An Essay upon Prov. 8. chap. v. 30. Give me neither poverty nor riches'; (3) 'Essay on Court-factions'; and (4) 'Essay, that the condition of men in power is to be guided by their servants'. Its

other contents, which are more than twenty in number, are a medley of paradoxes, letters, characters, petitions, epitaphs, and verses. The volume, then, is an archetypal miscellany: not only is its subject matter heterogeneous, but it also mixes genres and combines literary modes. Moreover, the four self-styled essays are themselves strikingly varied in content and tone. The first is an intervention in epistemology. Opening with a bold rejection of Cartesian rationalism, it then meanders across a whole range of loosely associated topics, including James I's demonological beliefs, the quarrel between William Foster and Robert Fludd over sympathetic medicine, and the history of witchcraft trials. The other three essays are no less varied in content or form. They consist of a copious elaboration on a single verse from the book of Proverbs; an examination of the politics of faction, which takes the eructions of the first half of the seventeenth century as its subject matter, and begins with a self-deprecating, and characteristically verbose and elliptic, reference to Osborne's own '*rambling* method';[44] and a reflection on the nature of monarchy, which combines Hobbesian echoes, biblical stories, historical precedents, and the essayist's own 'experience' in a fierce denunciation of the culture of favourites and minions.

Like Cornwallis, Osborne sought to demonstrate his inventiveness as an essayist with a striking and urbane analogy that he used to describe his literary technique. Speaking in the preface of the mixed nature of his book, and its consequent openness to interpretation, and thus to praise and dispraise, he observed:

> Now if any one (a thing I have formerly been very chary of) shall read these papers, under the notion of approbation; he can no more make me proud, than such as dispraise them, angry: (It being the guise of all, to applaud those of their own opinion:) Of which there is none more mine, than that every thing is of a mixed nature, carrying a face like that in a pleated picture, suitable to the situation and light the beholder stands in, or is guided by.[45]

Osborne's analogy comes from visual culture and alludes to a particular style of novelty painting popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the turning, or 'pleated', picture. This style of anamorphic painting consisted of two different images, which were divided into strips, and then affixed or pasted onto a 'pleated', corrugated, or indented surface, with the effect that one image would be properly visible when gazed upon from the left, and the

[44] F. Osborne, *A Miscellany of Sundry Essayes, Paradoxes, and Problematicall Discourses, Letters and Characters; Together with Politicall Deductions from the History of the Earl of Essex, Executed Under Queen Elizabeth* (London: J. Grismond, 1659), sig. M8v; text modernised.

[45] Ibid., sig. B2r.

other from the right, but neither would be clear if the picture was looked upon directly.[46] The naturalist Robert Plot, who had seen an example at Gerards Bromley in Staffordshire in the late 1670s ('pictures of Henry the great of France and his Queen'), explained the technique:

> The board being indented according to the magnitude of the pictures, the prints or paintings were cut into parallel pieces, equal to the depth and number of indentures on the board; which being nicely done, the parallel pieces of the King's picture were pasted on the flats that strike the eye beholding it obliquely, on one side of the board; and those of the Queen's on the other; so that the edges of the parallel pieces of the prints or paintings exactly joining on the edges of the indentures, the work was done.[47]

The meaning of Osborne's analogy depends on the reader understanding the anamorphic technique and knowing how such paintings were made. Its purpose was twofold. First, it captures the elusive and multi-perspectival aspect of miscellanies and essays – the fact that, by dint of their '*mixed nature*', they are shifting, and sometimes also contradictory, textual forms. Second, and just as importantly, it underscores the essential craft and assemblage of the two genres: like pleated pictures, essays and miscellanies are also made up of fragments; their citations and commonplaces, examples and extracts, are the equivalents of the vertical strips or '*parallel pieces*' that constituted the raw ingredients of those paintings. Separated out, these textual fragments, like the individual strips, have little meaning. But reassembled they can be made to constitute a coherent whole, and also something surprising and new. Osborne's analogy thus articulates the central paradox of miscellanies: that something as capacious and heterogeneous could still be recognised as a form of order and a way of engaging with the worlds of both words and things. Furthermore, in its combination of the abstruse, the novel, and the mundane, the analogy also exactly befits the essay in its seventeenth-century form and encapsulates what made it, when in rhetorically skilful hands such as Osborne's, so compelling a vehicle for exploration and reflection.

A Brief Jonsonian (and Johnsonian) Conclusion

In his *Timber: or Discoveries* (1641), Ben Jonson pugnaciously remarked that essayists 'in all they write confess still what books they have read last – and

[46] A. Shickman, '"Turning pictures" in Shakespeare's England', *Art Bulletin*, 59:1 (1977), 67–70.
[47] R. Plot, *The Natural History of Stafford-Shire* (Oxford: Printed at the Theatre, 1686), p. 391.

therein their own folly – so much, that they bring it to the stake raw and undigested'. This was true, he asserted, even for 'their master, Montaigne'.[48] Jonson here gave voice to what would later become a common accusation and fear: that the essayist was 'the mere purveyor of commonplaces stolen from others'.[49] As this chapter has shown, that complaint was not necessarily unjustified: the early essay was made from commonplaces, and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century essayists were thoroughly immersed in commonplace culture. A book such as Baildon's *Flowers* exemplifies the kind of 'raw and undigested' composition that Jonson bemoans. But, as the other examples discussed in this chapter show, in more adept hands, the same method could still produce richly inventive discourse and unfamiliar perspectives on commonplace topics and well-trod ground. Furthermore, it was the combination of influences – the fact that essayists mixed the verbal resources of commonplace books with the capacious methods of Gellian-type miscellanies – that made this kind of generic reinvention possible. The seventeenth-century essay, in other words, was by definition a commonplace form. But that did not mean that essays always ended up either as the schoolboy formula that Ralph Johnson prescribed, or the windy, wordy derivative that his near namesake decried.

[48] B. Jonson, *Discoveries*, ed. L. Hutson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 524–5.
[49] Karshan and Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work', p. 2.

4

Incoherence Brought to Order: Empiricism and the Essay

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Any examination of the epistemology of the eighteenth-century essay might usefully begin by asking why the author of the founding work of systematic empiricism titled it an 'Essay' in the first place. As his 'Epistle to the Reader' makes clear, John Locke chose the term with care. The 'Epistle' recounts how the initial impetus for writing the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) arose from Locke's frustration at the way in which many of the debates he engaged in with his friends ended up heading down blind alleys:

> Were it fit to trouble thee with the History of this Essay, I should tell thee that five or six Friends meeting at my Chamber, and discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the Difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled our selves, without coming nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it came into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we set our selves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abilities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with.[1]

The root of the problem, Locke determined, lay in the participants' collective failure properly to establish the parameters and preconditions of what could possibly constitute an intelligible discussion of the topic at hand. To remedy this deficiency, what was needed was an epistemological groundwork that could gauge the capacity of the human mind to inquire into certain questions, based upon a clear understanding of the human intellectual frame: its origins, its structure, its capabilities, and its limitations. The *Essay* was to conduct a foundational reassessment of method, to 'examine our own Abilities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with'.[2]

[1] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 7.
[2] Ibid.

To this end, following Francis Bacon's example, Locke undertook to clear 'the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge', and specifically 'Vague and insignificant Forms of Speech, and Abuse of Language, [which] have so long passed for Mysteries of Science'.[3]

And yet, even as the 'Epistle' identifies the need for a methodical first philosophy based on primary principles of human understanding, Locke's account of the origins of the *Essay* reveals that its history of composition followed the same unsystematic, unmethodical process for assembling knowledge that had led to its conception:

> This I proposed to the Company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first Enquiry. Some hasty and undigested Thoughts, on a Subject I had never before considered, which I set down against our next Meeting, gave the first entrance into this Discourse, which having been thus begun by Chance, was continued by Intreaty; written by incoherent parcels; ... and at last ... it was brought into that order, thou now seest it.[4]

Locke takes pains to present the *Essay* not as a preliminary discourse on method produced through solitary reflection *à la* Descartes, but as a motley collection of initial steps in the science of human knowledge, a collaborative assemblage of 'hasty and undigested Thoughts ... written by incoherent parcels; ... brought into ... order'. The 'Epistle' suggests that, rather than a systematic propaedeutic *to* philosophical discussion, the *Essay* presents its reader with a less incoherent and more ordered arrangement *of* that discussion. To underline this distinction, Locke takes aim at those critics who have read the work as if it were a unified, systematic treatise and 'have publish'd their censures of my *Essay*, with this honour done to it, that they will not suffer it to be an *Essay* ...'.[5] Typical of this perspective is Richard Blackmore's later verdict that, despite its title, the *Essay* 'by its Extent, as well as accuracy and methodical Composure, it may justly be reckon'd among large and compleat Treatises'.[6] It was precisely to forestall such readings that Locke maintained that the fundamental aim of the *Essay* was to rehabilitate philosophy to society and to integrate it 'into well-bred Company, and polite Conversation'.[7]

[3] Ibid., p. 10. [4] Ibid., p. 7.

[5] Ibid., p. 12. See R. Colie, 'The essayist in his *Essay*' in J.W. Yolton (ed.), *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 234–71. Colie observes that many eighteenth-century readers saw the *Essay* 'as a model for self-experiment, for self-assaying' (p. 261).

[6] R. Blackmore, *Essays Upon Several Subjects* (London: E. Curll, 1716), p. iii.

[7] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 7.

What Locke's 'Epistle' reveals is an epistemological ambivalence that lies not just within the essay genre, but also within British empiricism itself. This ambiguity manifests as a cleavage in Enlightenment thought between communicative and apodeictic models of reason, or between what Jürgen Habermas identifies as the spheres of 'lifeworld' and 'system' in the eighteenth century. According to Habermas, in the 'constitutive', 'already interpreted', 'intersubjectively shared' lifeworld, discourse is determined by the pragmatic considerations of speech acts that collectively underpin communicative rationality; in the regulative 'system', by contrast, the thinker engages with a world determined by considerations of truth and falsity, in which thought is made the object of reflection.[8] And yet, rather than identifying itself with either of these possibilities, the essay *internalises* the epistemological fold within empiricism.

Accordingly, from Locke onwards, the genre simultaneously follows two divergent epistemological pathways. In one direction, in the works of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, David Hume, and Samuel Johnson, the familiar essay becomes an analogue for an idea of 'experience' that is primarily communicative and 'open'. At the same time, in its more systematic or 'closed' mode, the essay honours the *Essay*'s commitment to sound method, demonstrative reasoning, and argumentative conclusiveness. Through this latter, systematic trajectory, the essay contributes to the expansion of abstract knowledge and the specialisation of intellectual functions engendered by instrumental rationality, leading to the flourishing of the 'academic' essay practised by a new generation of professional scholars, including natural and moral philosophers. By accommodating both 'open' and 'closed' modes, the eighteenth-century essay presents itself as Janus-faced, offering writers both a vehicle for expressing the quickness of subjectivity in its communicative engagements *and* a tool for robust scientific procedure and demonstrative reasoning.

Experience and Experiment

Historically, this divergence between the 'open' and the 'closed' essay is rooted in the conflicting legacies of Michel de Montaigne and Bacon.[9] In the

[8] J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), vol. 1, p. 82.

[9] See, however, K. Murphy's 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' in this volume (Ch. 2), which troubles this distinction.

more open essay tradition of Montaigne, experience/experiment is figured as personal, provisional, and protean. Laced with scepticism, conversation, and self-deprecating humour, Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) promote complexity and indeterminacy over certainty, cultivating style and pleasure over methodological correctness. As he declares in 'Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions', 'I give my soul now one face, now another, according to which direction I turn in. If I speak of myself in different ways, that is because I look at myself in different ways'; indeed, as he concludes, '[w]e are all patchwork, and so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, each moment, plays its own game. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.'[10] In Montaigne's formative hands, the essay eschews the quest for certainty in order to cultivate 'experience' and 'experiment' as practical, error-strewn attempts at intersubjective communication. Accordingly, as Montaigne claims in 'The Art of Discussion', 'opinions are all one to me, and I am almost indifferent about which opinion wins. I will argue peaceably a whole day if the debate is conducted with order.'[11]

Bacon's essays, it should be registered, exhibit a similar concern with the connections between discovery and dialogue. Yet for Bacon the essay is a tool for examining moral, political, and epistemological problems, an instrument for the discovery of truth. As he argues in *Novum Organum* (1620), 'truth is to be sought for not in the felicity of any age, which is an unstable thing, but in the light of nature and experience, which is eternal'.[12] Like the aphorisms of the *Novum Organum*, the *Essayes* (1597) form part of Bacon's broader endeavour to supplant syllogistic reasoning with induction and experiment as the only secure and sound procedures for the interpretation of nature. Essays on topics such as truth, love, friendship, and suspicion became practical trials of useful knowledge, interpretative exercises that deployed experience to order knowledge. Conceived as a tool in knowledge-formation, the planned experience of the Baconian essay instrumentalised awareness. In 'Of Friendship', for example, Bacon expresses the nature of companionship primarily in terms of its utility, arguing that 'the best way to represent to life the manifold use of friendship, is to cast and see how many things there are which a man cannot do himself'.[13] While for

[10] M. Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 242–4.
[11] Ibid., p. 706.
[12] F. Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath, 14 vols. (1857–74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), vol. 4, p. 60.
[13] Ibid., vol. 11, p. 442.

Montaigne civil conversation offers a communicative model of experiment, in Bacon the essay embodies the sound procedures and methods in experience demanded by the search for useful truths. Montaignian experience proliferates into possibilities; in Bacon it is distilled into demonstrations.

The legacy of these competing models of empirical knowledge (unmethodical versus methodical, play versus system, *doxa* versus *episteme*) would pull the essay genre in different directions throughout the Enlightenment period, although the nascent boundaries between the two models were not always apparent. In his 'Pröemial Essay' (1661), for instance, Robert Boyle laments that thinking men were 'obliged to write either systems or nothing', while 'many excellent notions or experiments are, by sober and modest men, suppressed'.[14] Boyle urges the learned to abandon the systematic treatise in favour of 'that form of writing, which (in imitation of the French) we call essays'.[15] And yet, rather than echoing the perspectivism of Montaigne, Boyle's essay incorporates the experimentalism of Bacon, supplanting Montaignian playfulness with procedure and installing the essay as the instrument of methodised experience. Consequently, the experimental essay in late seventeenth-century Britain increasingly became, in James Paradis's words, 'the literary expression, par excellence, of the motto of the Royal Society, *Nullius in Verba* (On the word of no man)' – codifying the objectification of the self and the instrumentalisation of experience within the new scientific method.[16]

Social Empiricism

In Britain, Montaigne's motley, polymorphous model of essayistic subjectivity was launched into a new literary economy of the self. Buoyed by the growth of print culture in the eighteenth century, the essay established itself as both medium and metaphor for the free and open discursive realm of the public sphere. Based upon the idea of inclusivity and unprejudiced conversation, this sphere initially constituted itself as a critical authority in what Habermas calls the 'training ground' of salons, coffeehouses, and literary

[14] R. Boyle, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, ed. T. Birch, 3rd ed., 6 vols. (London: J. & F. Rivington, et al., 1772), vol. 1, p. 301.
[15] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 303.
[16] J. Paradis, 'Montaigne, Boyle, and the essay of experience' in G. Levine and A. Rauch (eds.), *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 60–1. For more on the objectification of the self through empiricism, see E. Plunkett's 'Plain English: essays and analytic philosophy' in this volume (Ch. 28).

publications, especially those that drew from the new bourgeois sciences of political economy and psychological empiricism.[17] By appropriating philosophical discourse and cultural critique from the schoolmen, participators in the public sphere were drawn to an ideal of critical reflection that was primarily communicative rather than scholarly. As Habermas notes, it was 'through the critical absorption of philosophy, literature, and art that the public attained enlightenment and realized itself as the latter's living process'.[18] The circulation of journals and weeklies provided a medium through which this critical self-identification could occur on a scale wider than that permitted by local coffeehouses. In this way, the eighteenth-century British 'public' came into being through the same culture of communicative empiricism that helped to shape the conversational character of the familiar essay.

With its links to other paratextual or 'secondary' forms of literature such as commonplace books, reading manuals, and personal correspondence, the familiar essay forged a social connection with its reader through its informal, conversational manner. As Jon Mee notes, periodicals such as *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* helped to foster the notion that 'culture was the process of exchange between participants rather than the fulfilment of prior identities'.[19] Inspired by the 'open', experimental empiricism of Locke's *Essay*, Addison and Steele endeavoured to establish a dynamic interrelationship between writer and reader, one based upon what Scott Black calls 'a communicative dynamic of mutuality and a shared assumption of agency'.[20] For Addison and Steele, the possibility of an empiricism based upon the continuity between communication and experiment offered an opportunity to draw philosophy out of the academy and into the thoroughfare of public life. Like Socrates, who 'brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men', Addison undertook to bring 'Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables, and in Coffee-houses'.[21] In addition, Steele and Addison exploited the essay's potential to move amphibiously

[17] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 29.

[18] Ibid., p. 42.

[19] J. Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 21. See, too, J. Mee and J. Buckley's discussion in 'Clubs and coffeehouses: sociability and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 11).

[20] S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 105.

[21] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 44.

across modes and genres, between philosophical and literary modes of expression, and between academic and public writing.

It was this culture of communicative, dialogical empiricism that would later shape the essays of Hume and Johnson. And yet, while the Montaignian essay (playful, non-linear, and foundationless) ultimately became a metaphor for experience *itself*, for a writer like Johnson this was not a cause for celebration. In his account of the verbal roots of 'essay', he disapprovingly notes the following senses: '1. Attempt; endeavour. 2. A loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition. 3. A trial; an experiment'. Johnson was aware that the notion of 'trial' linked the term 'essay' to 'experiment' and 'experience', both of which had etymological roots in the Latin '*experiri*', or 'to try, put to the test'. In turn, Johnson's definition of the essay as a 'loose sally of the mind' parallels his definition of *empiricism* as the disorderly method of practice, trial, and experiment. Defining 'empirical' as '[k]nown only by experience; practised only by rote, without rational grounds', he dismisses 'empiricism' as '[d]ependence on experience without knowledge or art; quackery'.[22] Johnson's disdain for the terms 'essay', 'experience', and 'empirical' reveals his concern that, in the absence of *a priori* or pre-established epistemological norms, the unsystematic Montaignian essay offered only the flimsiest foundation for the regulation of public discourse. In a climate of 'polite' scepticism, in which philosophical doubt was tolerated on the condition that it did not stray into questioning the existence of truth, morality, or the deity, this might have been sufferable; in an age of radical scepticism, in which some argued that 'empiricism' represented the totality of knowledge, it was not.

The Sceptical Essayist

The rise of scepticism in the mid-eighteenth century raised the epistemological stakes for the familiar essay, which, with its scope for improvisation, digression, and irony, provided the philosophy of sceptical empiricism with its natural home. Indeed, as Leo Damrosch observes, 'in an empiricist age that was suspicious of grandiose literary aspirations, any reaching toward "truth" was almost compelled to be essayistic'.[23] By the second half of the

[22] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (London: J. Mifflin, 1777), *s.v.* 'essay', 'experience', and 'empiricism'.

[23] L. Damrosch, *Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 21.

century, however, this essayism was viewed less as the joyful marriage of literary form and sociable reason and more as part of the intellectual mobilisation urgently needed to overcome the alienation between reflection and experience. For writers such as Hume and Johnson, the breach that philosophy had created between scientific knowledge and everyday thought had introduced a schism between philosophical cogitation and 'ordinary' experience and communication of the sort that had given rise to Locke's *Essay*. This preoccupation manifests thematically in their essays in the shape of the recurring dyad of 'learning' and 'life'. Hume's observation, for instance, in 'The Sceptic', that 'while we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone' and that 'to reduce life to exact rule and method, is commonly a painful, oft a fruitless occupation', exemplifies this concern.[24] Similarly, Johnson's sense of the contradiction that lies within the modern method of analysis and self-examination is suggested by Imlac's intervention in one of the many unresolved debates in *Rasselas* (1759): 'It seems to me ... that while you are making the choice of life, you neglect to live.'[25]

This alienation between the spheres of reflective thought and 'life' is a problem that reaches to the heart of eighteenth-century empiricism. For sceptical essayists such as Hume and Johnson, a decline in communication and trust between what Hume termed the 'Dominions of Learning' and 'those of Conversation' alerted intellectuals to their civic duty as cultural mediators. The essay, he believed, could bridge the divide between the professional world of the scholar and the public sphere of the conversationalist. Hume depicts the relationship between the scholarly and conversable worlds as a 'Balance of Trade' in which the 'Materials ... must chiefly be furnish'd by Conversation and common Life', while 'manufacturing ... belongs to Learning'; between these realms, the role of the philosophical essayist becomes that of a mediator, 'a Kind of Resident or Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation'.[26]

Hume's economic metaphor reversed the Addisonian picture of empirical philosophy as the supplier of intellectual debate to the public sphere; instead, for Hume, philosophy was compelled to draw its materials from, and be tested against, the everyday conversations that occurred in civil society. In this way, Addison's attempt to bring philosophy and science out of the

[24] D. Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller, revised ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), p. 180.
[25] S. Johnson, *Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. G.J. Kolb (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 111.
[26] Hume, *Essays*, p. 535.

academies and into the coffeehouses was radically inverted by Hume, who endeavoured to incorporate the language of sociability into the principles of philosophy itself. As Nicholas Phillipson observes, the effect of Hume's subordination of private philosophising to public essaying 'was to transform the language of Addisonian politeness by showing that it could be turned into a vehicle of science and used to derive an entirely new account of the principles of human nature'.[27]

Although Johnson shared Hume's doubts about the pretensions of systematic philosophy, he was dismissive of 'empiricism' as a form of unmethodical, essayistic experimentation; for him, this lacked both a secure anchoring in moral duty and a firm sense of order. In *The Rambler*, the quintessential empiricist is figured by the virtuoso, whose miscellaneous activities became the focus of nos. 82 and 83. Distinguished by his 'unextinguishable ardour of curiosity' and 'taste for solid knowledge', the virtuoso searches the old and the new worlds for scattered objects of interest with no direction or purpose to his research.[28] In his purposelessness, the virtuoso encapsulates everything that troubled Johnson about an age of scientific discovery based upon purely empirical and inductive methods: without any formal, normative standards against which the influx of new data might be assessed and interpreted, the outcome of the empiric's object-obsessed activity would be the diminishment, rather than the enrichment, of the common good.

While Johnson admitted that the virtuoso 'cannot be said to be wholly useless' (since it is 'impossible to determine the limits of enquiry, or to foresee what consequences a new discovery may produce'), the latter embodied a dangerous excess of empirical learning.[29] And yet, despite their troubling similarities, the essayist possessed at least one advantage over the virtuoso: the former's sociable 'experience' encompassed an active engagement with the traditions and testimonies of past writers. In contrast to the essayist, whose work was imbricated with the wisdom of generations of writers, the virtuoso 'is inclined not only to promote his own study, but to exclude all others from regard, and having heated his imagination with some favourite pursuit, wonders that the rest of mankind are not seized with the same passion'.[30] Finally, then, it is the essayist's dutiful social engagement

[27] N. Phillipson, 'Politics, politeness and the anglicisation of early eighteenth-century Scottish culture' in R.A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286–1815* (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987), p. 235.

[28] S. Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vols. 3–5: *The Rambler*, ed. W.J. Bate and A.B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 4, pp. 65, 68.

[29] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 72. [30] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 71.

that saves them from disappearing down a rabbit-hole of particularity. Accordingly, as Johnson claims in *The Rambler* no. 4, the 'task of our present writers . . . requires, together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world'.[31]

Systemic Disposition

Most of the great philosophical essays of Hume and Johnson appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of the century, however, the ambassadorial middle ground between scholarly learning and public discourse could no longer hold. As science diversified and deepened, and the book trade burgeoned, the Montaignian essay, which continued to prioritise (albeit with growing wistfulness) sociability, communicability, and civic virtues, drifted further away from the Baconian essay, which utilised the essay as a vehicle for an increasingly abstract form of rationality pursued through technical and theorised experimental procedures. In this respect, Richard Blackmore's earlier doubts regarding the suitability of essays or 'small Discourses' to convey 'full and comprehensive Conceptions of Things' proved prescient:

> There is that Connexion, Dependence, and beautiful Order of the Parts in a perfect Body of Science, that it is impossible to contemplate the whole Structure but in a lame and imperfect View, when the Members of it are sever'd and disunited, as they are in small Discourses. If the relation of one Proposition to another, and the coherent Train of Conclusions are not discern'd by the Mind, there must follow a great Confusion and Obscurity of Ideas; and at best those Men, for want of full and comprehensive Conceptions of Things, will only perceive some scatter'd Branches of Truth, and form but a dim and defective Sketch of any Art or System of Knowledge.[32]

Blackmore's claim that the essay was able to communicate to its reader only 'a great Confusion and Obscurity of Ideas' and 'a dim and defective Sketch of any Art or System of Knowledge', highlights the essay's uneasy relationship with the modern scientific episteme.

[31] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 20. [32] Blackmore, *Essays*, p. iv.

Clifford Siskin has argued that the emergence of the idea of 'system' marked a transition from traditional folk knowledge based upon discourse, oral testimony, and persons to a knowledge grounded upon the 'epistemological visualism' of observation, sight, and objects.[33] For Siskin, the paradigm shift mediated by the competing genres of 'system' and 'essay' in the eighteenth century reflects a division between fundamentally different epistemological world views:

> An essay then was not today's polished pearl but an irregular attempt – sometimes adventurous and always unfinished – 'a loose sally,' in Johnson's words. System, however, sought – and assumed the possibility of – completion, reducing 'many things' to 'order'. To choose one or another was not just to indicate a stylistic preference but to make a statement about what could and should be known, and how.[34]

Like the familiar essay, then, the systematic essay internalised the fundamental antinomy of Locke's 'Epistle': that is, between thought as loose, adventurous, and collaborative and thought as ordered by firm foundations and sound methods. In doing so, however, it faced this dilemma between communicative and apodeictic models of empirical rationality from the opposite direction: where the Montaignian familiar essay threatened to collapse into the disorder and muddle of Locke's 'incoherent parcels', the Baconian essay threatened to surpass the limits of what was essayable. As Locke discovered, once an author had established his system, it seemed falsely modest at best and misleading at worst to dress it up merely as an attempt, experiment, or tentative trial.

This difficulty stalked one of the century's most celebrated systematic essays, Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (1733–34), which engaged with the question of system both as a core theme and as a problem relating to its own organisation. The systematic ambitions of the *Essay on Man* are made plain in Pope's Dedication to Lord Bolingbroke, in which he claims that the chief merit of the *Essay* is 'in forming a *temperate* yet not *inconsistent*, and a *short* yet not *imperfect* system of Ethics'.[35] Nonetheless, Pope's insistence on the limitedness of human intellect leads him to distinguish between human systems and divine systems, and he declares in the first premise of the

[33] C. Siskin, *System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), p. 28.
[34] Ibid., p. 33.
[35] A. Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. J. Butt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 502.

Essay that '*we can judge only with regard to* our own system, *being ignorant of the* relations *of systems and things*'.[36]

Accordingly, Pope outlines a deductive argument to demonstrate the necessary existence of a great chain of being that encompasses man yet lies beyond human comprehension:

> Of Systems possible, if 'tis confest
> That Wisdom infinite must form the best,
> Where all must full or not coherent be,
> And all that rises, rise in due degree;
>
> Then in the scale of reas'ning life, 'tis plain
>
> There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man;[37]

The language of 'Systems possible', 'coheren[ce]', and necessary entailment ('must be') that runs throughout the *Essay on Man* is more reminiscent of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's principles of sufficient reason and necessity than Locke's essay on experience. Indeed, although they lay unpublished at the time that Pope wrote his *Essay*, Leibniz's own foray into essayism, *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1765), prefigured Pope's attempt to systematise the essay genre and thus turn it against the empiricist. Leibniz argued that the ability systematically to sequence truths through necessary connection is what distinguishes human beings, who are capable of 'demonstrative knowledge', from 'beasts', who 'are sheer empirics and are guided entirely by instances'.[38] This did not, however, mean that the human mind had unfettered access to absolute knowledge: as Leibniz cautioned, 'it would indeed be wrong to think that we can easily read these eternal laws of reason in the soul, as the Praetor's edict can be read on his notice-board, without effort or inquiry'.[39] The limitedness of human apperception and reflection ensures that all but a few of the infinite number of perceptions that exist in us pass unnoticed.

In a similar way, even as Pope affirmed the existence of a universal system, he maintained that the human apprehension of this great chain of being could only ever be partial and imperfect:

> Say first, of God above, or Man below
> What can we reason, but from what we know?

[36] Ibid., p. 503. [37] Ibid., pp. 505–6.
[38] G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 50.
[39] Ibid.

> Of Man what see we, but his station here,
> From which to reason, or to which refer?
> Thro' worlds unnumber'd tho' the God be known,
> 'Tis ours to trace him only in our own.[40]

While neither Leibniz's monadology nor Pope's great chain of being would survive the rise of sceptical empiricism in mid-eighteenth-century Britain, the systematic essay continued to flourish. As the extensive list of exhaustive treatises bearing the title 'essay' testifies, for many working at the forefront of scientific inquiry, any essay worth its salt implied an attempt at a *system*. Later examples of the systematic essay include Robert Dossie's *Institutes of Experimental Chemistry: Being an Essay Towards Reducing that Branch of Natural Philosophy to a Regular System* (1759); John Holden's *An Essay Towards a Rational System of Music* (1770); and Axel Fredric Cronstedt's *An Essay Towards a System of Mineralogy* (1770). Like many systematic essays of the period, Jolly B. Florian's *An Essay on an Analytical Course of Studies, Containing a Complete System of Human Knowledge* (1796), acknowledges the 'immortal Bacon' as the prime mover behind the ordering of knowledge: 'the first who conceived, and who dared to mark out a plan of all the branches of learning of which man is capable'.[41] By doing so, however, such essays ignored the blow that Hume had dealt to the epistemological foundations of any scientific enterprise aimed at establishing apodeictic knowledge.

In Scotland, the fate of the systematic essay was tied to attempts by philosophers such as Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart to obviate Hume's sceptical challenge by combining intuitive principles with deductive observation. Demonstration could ultimately only rest upon the self-evident and indemonstrable, or what Reid termed the 'inductive principle', a fundamental and incorrigible predisposition in human beings to assume the existence of order in nature.[42] Reid's inductive principle became the cornerstone of his conception of 'pneumatology' (the branch of philosophy concerned with the human mind), which, as he claims in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), aspired to the same level of completeness and demonstrability as natural philosophy; consequently, 'we ought never to despair of human genius, but rather to hope that, in time, it may produce a system of the

[40] Pope, *Poems*, pp. 504–5.
[41] J.B. Florian, *An Essay on an Analytical Course of Studies, Containing a Complete System of Human Knowledge* (London: Printed for the author, 1796), p. 3.
[42] T. Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense*, 4th ed. (London: J. Bell & W. Creech, 1785), pp. 427–8.

powers and operations of the human mind no less certain than those of optics or astronomy'.[43] The same principle in modified form was incorporated by Stewart into his *Philosophical Essays* (1810), which proclaim continuity with the Baconian tradition of experimental science by offering their observations on the human faculties as 'instruments for the investigation of truth'.[44] Indeed, Stewart adds, 'the whole of a philosopher's life . . . is one continued *series of experiments* on his own faculties and powers; and the superiority he possesses over others, arises chiefly from the general rules . . . which he has deduced from these experiments'.[45] And yet, for Stewart, such essays of experience or 'experiments' could finally be justified only in relation to the most fundamental intuitive axioms of mathematics and metaphysics.

Ultimately, then, what sets the essays of Pope, Leibniz, Reid, and Stewart apart from those of Montaigne, Addison, and Hume is their denial of the *primacy* of the empirical, seeing it not as the foundation of reason, but at best as a way of confirming the truths of reason in practice. As Leibniz observed, 'the senses give the occasion, and the results of experiments also serve to corroborate reason, somewhat as checks in arithmetic help us to avoid errors of calculation in long chains of reasoning'.[46] Despite their willingness to limit human knowledge, no systematic essayist was prepared to expose the essence of reason to the 'essay' of experience. As Siskin notes, in its systematic mode, the essay manifested either as an 'essay towards system' (in which the essay functions as the first in a sequence of moves towards a scaled-up system), or as a system embedded *within* an essay (in which the scaling-up of the essay into a larger systematic whole is relinquished in favour of accumulating 'systems in essays').[47] Detached from empirical foundations, system essays were 'essays' in the strictly limited sense of being endeavours to present something that had already been worked out elsewhere, rather than risky thought experiments that embark *in medias res*. From this perspective, the essayism of the systematic essay, like Leibniz's deployment of philosophical dialogue, was an incidental and not essential part of its fundamental character.

In her 1987 book, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, Réda Bensmaïa criticises those studies of the essay that treat it 'as already empirically or formally imprisoned', thereby precluding 'any consideration of the

[43] T. Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: J. Bell, 1785), p. 5.
[44] D. Stewart, *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. W. Hamilton, 11 vols. (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1854–60), vol. 5, p. 29.
[45] Ibid., vol. 5, p. 33. [46] Leibniz, *New Essays*, p. 50. [47] Siskin, *System*, pp. 131–2.

essay's specificity as an *a-generic* text or as an *anti-genre*'.[48] For Bensmaïa, this a-generic character of the essay stems from the ways in which the essayist disrupts conventional literary and disciplinary boundaries by having no determinate or consistent role when writing. What matters to the essayist, rhetorically speaking, is not '*dispositio* – putting in order what has been found', but '*complicatio*', of producing pleasure, criticism, difference.[49] And yet, for eighteenth-century philosophical essayists, both *dispositio* and *complicatio* were viable (though ultimately incompatible) models for communicating the adventures and experiments of human thought. The tensions within empiricism revealed by Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* led to the Enlightenment essay pursuing two divergent paths. Based in sceptical *complicatio* and dialogue, the Montaignian essay fitted the model of a 'socialised' empiricism constituted through the lifeworld of the public sphere. At the same time, encouraged by Locke's endeavour in the *Essay* to bring 'order' to discourse, the systematic essay continued the Baconian tradition of utilising the essayistic experiment to establish apodeictic truth. Any assessment, then, of the philosophy of the eighteenth-century British essay must not only address the extent to which empiricism influenced the genre; it must also consider the ways in which the philosophy of the period was shaped by essaying.

[48] R. Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 9.
[49] Ibid., p. 6.

5

The Sermon and the Essay

NOAM REISNER

When T.S. Eliot composed an essay on the sermons of celebrated Elizabethan and Jacobean preacher Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), he was responding to Andrewes as a supreme writer, whose sermons, Eliot opines, 'rank with the finest English prose of their time, of any time'.[1] Eliot's interest in Andrewes extended well beyond literary criticism and had far more to do with Eliot's spiritual investment in Anglican piety at the time. Nevertheless, the praise Eliot accords to Andrewes is to a fellow writer whose style Eliot characterises as one of 'ordonnance, or arrangement and structure, precision in the use of words, and relevant intensity'.[2] 'Relevant intensity' is an interesting evaluative term, at once vague and suggestive. It speaks both to Eliot's personal experience of reading *in* Andrewes as well as to a more generalised observation about the way in which Andrewes's sermons develop their devotional impact in controlled stages of hermeneutical exegesis. Eliot was reading Andrewes in the wake of the late Victorian revival of Anglo-Catholicism, from a limited selection of printed Christmas Sermons culled from the *Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology* (1841–54), which itself reproduced intact Andrewes's sermons as they first appeared in 1629 as *XCVI. Sermons by . . . Lancelot Andrewes*.[3] In other words, Eliot was reading Andrewes with a keen essayist's eye having accepted the printed presentment of the sermons as set pieces of High Anglican piety and devotional contemplation. In the act of reading and critically reflecting on them, Eliot transforms Andrewes's sermons into devotional essays whose 'relevant intensity' becomes an aspect of an intimate literary style rather than oral delivery.

[1] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (1951; London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 341.
[2] Ibid., p. 344.
[3] See P. McCullough (ed.), *Lancelot Andrewes: Selected Sermons & Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. xiii–xiv.

Sermons, however, are not essays, and constitute an independent and culturally all-important prose medium in the post-Reformation reality of early modern England, which shaped the religious and spiritual experience of countless people who attended sermons regularly across the entire spectrum of English society. Whether preached at court or at St Paul's Cross or in the rural parishes, early modern sermons offered preachers a wide platform from which not only to preach the gospel, but also to deliver news, comment on the events of the day, and shape public opinion on key doctrinal and political controversies.[4] While this does not sound far removed from what we might envision a public essay doing today in a more provisional or anecdotal sense, in the early modern period the Montaignian essay of associative subjective introspection, or the Baconian essay of vicarious meditation and experimentation, were relatively new generic forms that grew primarily from the humanist tradition of epistolary counsel in the style of Cicero's or Seneca's Epistles. While it is true, then, that early modern English sermons and essays developed more or less concurrently from broadly shared roots in the period's wide revival in the classical rhetorical arts, sermons primarily developed from within the ancient patristic and medieval tradition of the *artes praedicandi* ('preaching arts'), undergoing numerous stylistic and structural developments peculiar to the form. Any similarities a sermon or essay might share, therefore, are primarily superficial, but not, as we shall see, altogether inconsequential.

Reading Sermons as Essays

As Peter Mack has shown, techniques of biblical exegesis, which are the cornerstone of preaching, frequently depended on humanist hermeneutical practices of explicating classical texts, relying on rhetoric and dialectic to interpret 'pedagogical commonplaces'[5] – a practice on which Montaigne frequently relies. Indeed, one could even make the argument that sermons and essays have shared roots in the early modern commonplace-book tradition, since many preachers drew on their commonplace books and available

[4] The potentially seditious power of preaching led to the Crown's concerted and often futile efforts to censor and even legislate the subject matter of sermons. For a discussion of censorship and the Jacobean pulpit, see, e.g., J. Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 36–45; and, more generally, M. Morrissey, *Politics and the Paul's Cross Sermons, 1558–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[5] P. Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 261.

miscellanies of classical and patristic proverbs and *sententiae* to give their sermons a worldly appearance of humane learning, both on sacred and profane topics.[6] The early modern fondness for learned quotations and allusions across a fragmented body of texts rising together to the force of a cohesive argument working out a thought, experience, or an emotion, certainly accounts for many of the surprising similarities an essay by William Cornwallis or Francis Bacon might share with the sermons of Andrewes and John Donne (who are themselves strikingly different in style).

Part of the problem in any such comparison is in the terms of evaluation by which the two prose genres are aligned. For example, when the differences between sermons and essays are resolved into questions of prose style, we find that it is never a simple matter of distinguishing between, say, sacred as opposed to secular forms of writing, or so-called Senecan or Ciceronian categories.[7] Both Bacon and Andrewes shared a disdain for the copious Ciceronianism of the Elizabethan euphuists and a general fondness for parallelism, aphorism, and symmetry, but this says very little about what Bacon's inductive method of experiential essay writing might actually have in common with Andrewes's unique brand of pulpit prose. Any similarities an early modern sermon or essay might share are surprising, therefore, when viewed in these terms because of either medium's distinctly different aims when viewed in isolation.

The aim of an early modern sermon, certainly in the post-Reformation evangelical tradition, is to involve the auditory in a cooperative spiritual-religious encounter with the Word of God, where it was hoped that the 'Holy Spirit' would operate on the hearts of believers and move them to an amendment of life in light of the Gospel teachings. Such goals relied less on Ciceronian *movere* (neatly constructed arguments that could potentially move for their own sake) than on a broader affective experience that is finally numinous in character and frequently sacramental in its effects. The confusing nature of this goal, when set out in these terms, is that it does appear to track quite closely the secular rhetorical imperatives of persuasion and affective manipulation, but in a strikingly different context. Preaching

[6] See N. Reisner, 'The preacher and profane learning' in P. McCullough, H. Adlington, and E. Rhatigan (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 72–86; also, A. Vine's account in this volume, 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' (Ch. 3).

[7] On the irrelevance of rhetorical categories to early modern preaching theory, see M. Morrissey, 'Scripture, style and persuasion in seventeenth-century English theories of preaching', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53:4 (2002), 686–706.

manuals in the long history of what has come to be known as the *artes praedicandi* make wide use of rhetorical figures and composition principles in ways which often transform these concepts altogether, in the service of what Debora Shuger has discussed as a pervasively affective sacred rhetoric of the Renaissance, 'connecting problems of style ... to the Christian concept of selfhood'.[8]

When we read early modern sermons today, frequently out of context, we are presented with a further challenge because printed sermons rarely capture the original event of the sermon as it was delivered, very much in the same way a printed quarto of an early modern play is always at some remove from the actual performance that occasioned it. As Peter McCullough puts it, 'early modern sermons – whether "elite" or otherwise – were radically occasional pieces of performed writing, contingent upon the contexts in and for which they were delivered'.[9] Moreover, most preachers who oversaw the printing of their sermons took great pains to edit and prepare them for publication from their notes, while other printed sermons that survive were reconstructed from the notes of auditors who took them down or that were gathered posthumously from a preacher's surviving drafts – and all of this editorial work was subject to the religious-political agendas of publishers and printers. When reading a sermon, certainly at a great distance of time and place, as Eliot was reading Andrewes, it is easy to see why it might be seen as a detached essay: a preacher's exegesis or devotional meditations, usually on a scriptural text, appeal to those who read them with the force of an essay's invitation for self-examination and introspection on a variety of devotional topics and carefully considered pastoral arguments.

Given these important differences, it is difficult to say in what ways the methods and techniques of preachers influenced and shaped later developments in the early modern British essay, and vice versa. Nevertheless, if one takes the long view of the British essay, some contingencies between sermons and essays are inevitable, especially given the widespread printed afterlife of early modern sermons throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, which some ministers viewed as a blessing of God's providence to

[8] D.K. Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 8.

[9] P. McCullough, 'Preaching and context: John Donne's sermon at the funerals of Sir William Cokayne' in McCullough et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, p. 213.

advance reform beyond the pulpit.[10] Once sermons were read in print, which increasingly became the case throughout the seventeenth century, the impact they had on the development of expository prose styles in essay form was not negligible. By noting how sermons are different, we can begin to trace some surprising contingencies that lend credence to the idea that aspects of sermon writing, especially with regard to the preacher's construction of sacred authority in the mediation of spiritual experience, speak to central concerns of contemporary and later essayists.

Wisdom Over Eloquence

As the examples of Andrewes and Donne will show, 'elite' learned preachers relied on strategies of authorial construction likewise found in the essay form. Indeed, many of the differences between the two mediums that at first appear obvious begin to weaken when viewed from the point of view of authorial self-construction, suggesting, at the very least, that essayists and preachers (not infrequently the same authors wearing different hats) were equally concerned with problems of authority in public discourse.

John Buckeridge and William Laud, then Bishops of Ely and London, respectively, invoke Augustine's seminal preaching manual, *De doctrina christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*), in their address to King Charles I prefacing Laud's 1629 edition of Andrewes's *Sermons*. There, they expound the well-worn idea that sermons are superior to other forms of oratory since Christian 'wisdom', with its care for an ultimate 'truth', is preferable to the rhetorical guiles of secular 'eloquence':

> And here we humbly beg leave to tell Your *Majesty*, that *these Sermons* are in this, like their *Author*, mixed of *Religion* and *wisdom*. It is an excellent thing for a man to speak wisely, and eloquently, both at once: but where these perfections meet not, there saith Saint *Augustine*, *Dicat sapienter*, *quod non potest eloquenter*. Let the Preacher (of all men) speak that wisely, which he cannot utter eloquently. And if Saint *Augustine* in his time found that fit, out of all doubt 'tis necessary now, that men of our profession, set themselves to

[10] See J. Rigney, 'Sermons into print' in McCullough et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, pp. 199–212. Rigney gives the example of the Presbyterian minister Henry Newcome, who praised in 1660 the 'lively workings of gods spirit, to bring the hidden and deep mysteries of the Word written (and copied out into the heart of gods Ministers) into Sermons, & Sermons into printed volumes & printed volumes into the Houses of the godly' (quoted in Rigney, p. 203). Newcome's position was controversial. Rigney cites, by contrast, the Restoration minister Nathaniel Hardy's lament about the presses begetting a 'Bastard *brood of* Sermons' (p. 204).

> preach with more *wisdom*, than *eloquence*. With *Christian and religious Wisdom*; which alone knows how to preserve truth and peace together.[11]

Although Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* is not as systematic in its precepts as later preaching manuals in the medieval and Renaissance traditions, it offered a seminal precedent for the adapting of classical rhetoric into the sacred office of preaching. According to this influential paradigm, an ineloquent sermon which nevertheless displays the preacher's spiritual wisdom might benefit its auditory less than one where wisdom was complemented with suitable eloquence; however, an eloquent sermon that fails somehow to display God's wisdom is not a sermon at all, but a dangerous piece of oratory that, as Augustine puts it, depends on the fallacy that 'somebody who is heard to speak eloquently must also be speaking the truth' ('*eum quoniam diserte dicere audit etiam vere dicere existimat*').[12] As Augustine reasons, whereas a secular orator must match his style to the subject matter (which can vary considerably), sacred oratory is always concerned with being moved by and in turn moving others by a sacred, and therefore supremely grand, text. Not for the last time in the long tradition of the preaching arts, stylistic and spiritual categories mix, creating confusion about the way in which stylistic techniques may be applied to preaching.

Augustine's approach to sacred oratory in terms of a dialectic between a preacher's sacred office and its responsibility to move an audience towards God and their rhetorical skill to do so, runs as a thread through the history of the preaching arts. Often, it results in the complex techniques of *sprezzatura* (studied nonchalance or gracefulness) or in concealment of skill for fear of allowing eloquence to outshine God's wisdom. Indeed, as Gregory Kneidel argues, 'taken to its extreme, this argument for concealing evidence of artistic effort or human learning threatened to sever efficacy from ethics altogether' since it raised the spectre of hypocrisy and dishonest showmanship.[13] That is why William Perkins, the premier Calvinist theologian of Elizabethan England and author of the influential preaching manual *The Arte of Prophecying: or, a Treatise concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching* (1607), urged the godly preacher to 'hide' his '*Humane*

[11] L. Andrewes, *XCVI. Sermons by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes* (London: R. Badger, 1629), sig. A2r. All quoted early texts have been modernised for clarity.

[12] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 203.

[13] G. Kneidel, '*Ars prædicandi*: theories and practice' in McCullough et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, p. 7.

wisdom' in preaching 'because the hearers ought not to ascribe their faith to the gifts of men, but to the power of God's word'.[14] As long as God's wisdom enfolded in his Word remains at the centre of the sermon, the preacher can avoid the charge of hypocrisy aimed at their display of oratorical skill by implying, and actively showing in the impassioned delivery of the sermon, how they themselves are *moved* to such rhetorical skill by the zeal and passion of God's 'truth'.

This distinction between wisdom and eloquence is ancient and has its roots in Hellenic and Roman rhetorical traditions. Augustine himself concedes this when he cites as precedents the Roman orators who declared 'that wisdom without eloquence was of little value to society but that eloquence without wisdom was generally speaking a great nuisance, and never beneficial'.[15] This idea, based on the opening passage of Cicero's *De Inventione*, was usually applied in the history of the rhetorical arts to the ancient tension between rhetoric and dialectic, and the subsequent desire of many Renaissance rhetoricians to reconcile the arts of rhetoric and logic. Thomas Wilson attempts to do just this in his Elizabethan bestseller, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), when he applies logic and dialectics to the rhetorical compositional stages of *inventio* (invention of material or content) and *dispositio* (arrangement), so that orators may gather 'apt matter . . . of things true, or things likely, the which may reasonably set forth a matter, and make it appear probable'.[16] This was a precept, indeed, which many preachers benefited from in composing sermons, especially among learned preachers such as Andrewes or Donne who frequently relied, despite marked differences in temper, on dialectical techniques of logical analysis to gather their religious arguments from scripture.[17] Learned preachers, however, followed Augustine in transforming the concept of 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) from a vaguely pagan array of values associated with the wisdom of philosophical disputation or even just ethical prudence into a spiritual and deeply passionate engagement with what Augustine terms 'the heavenly truth that comes down from the father of light' ('*veram, hoc est supernam, quae a patre luminum*'), as reflected through the scriptures.[18]

[14] W. Perkins, *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ . . . William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: J. Legatt, 1626–35), vol. 2, p. 670. *The Arte of Prophecying* was originally published in Latin in 1592 as *Prophetica, sive de sacra et unica ratione concionandi tractatus*. It was translated into English and published after Perkins's death in 1607.

[15] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, p. 203.

[16] T. Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. G.H. Mair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 6.

[17] See Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, pp. 267–70.

[18] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, p. 203.

So, while Augustine laid the groundwork for thinking about the ancient rhetoric–logic divide in new terms adjusted for the aims of preaching, the implications of this idea are primarily hermeneutical and involve discussions about authority in scriptural exegesis. It suggests that the grandeur of sacred oratory is not a function of eloquence as such, but of the ability of the preacher to understand and then impart the sacred meanings of the divine text through rhetorical craft. Whether early modern sermons took on the form of a homily (a verse-by-verse exposition of a scriptural text) or, more commonly, of the thematic sermon (a sermon which derives its theme from a single verse or passage of scripture), they were first and foremost exercises in scriptural exegesis that relied on classical precepts of deliberative oratory.[19]

Early modern preachers, therefore, saw themselves as having to weave in and out of the received sense of a scriptural text of which they are mediators rather than authors, and this self-effacing stance of anti-authorship is one of the primary features which would seem to distinguish a sermon from a subjective essay in which the speaker's 'I' meanders through loosely associated thoughts and reflections. At the same time, it offers interesting connections that are no longer merely superficial, since in both cases the author's mediation of their perceived authority to speak and convey ideas and opinions is similarly dependent on rhetorical and dialectical techniques of exposition and analysis.

The Preacher as Essayist

Lancelot Andrewes, without a doubt one of the most unique and erudite of the so-called avant-garde High Church preachers of the later Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras, certainly does not represent the average style of preaching common at his time; nevertheless, his long-term legacy in print marks his sermons as crucial for our present discussion.[20] Many of Andrewes's

[19] For the complexities of thematic sermon divisions and development within the genre, see Kneidel, '*Ars prædicandi*', pp. 9–13. The form of the thematic sermon that became most prominent among English Protestant ministers was the 'doctrine-use scheme', which increasingly came to depend on Ramist methods of schematisation where a preacher first quotes scripture, then explicates the verse, applies the sense to various relevant doctrinal points, and finally applies the doctrine to his parishioners' daily concerns, gathering it back to the quoted verse. See also Morrissey, 'Scripture, style and persuasion', 693.

[20] The term 'avant-garde' was coined by N. Tyke in the context of an ascendent Arminian faction of preachers in the court of James I: *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also P. McCullough, '"Avant-garde conformity" in the 1590s' in A. Milton (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, Vol. 1: *Reformation and Identity, c. 1520–1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 380–94.

celebrated Jacobean court sermons on major feast days suggest themselves as examples of Andrewes's unique pulpit prose, with its careful construction of numinous, sacramental efficacy through a dazzling display of logical analyses, complex divisions, and verbal ingenuity. Andrewes was a master not just of biblical exegesis and oral delivery, but also of rhetorical techniques of authorial self-construction that rely, remarkably, not on the usual self-effacing tropes of spiritual *sprezzatura* and humility, but on his ability to insinuate his sacramental authority as a preacher into every syllable of his chosen biblical text.

A remarkable case in point is Andrewes's Easter Spital sermon, preached at St Mary's Hospital in 1588 before an audience that included London's political and mercantile elite. Delivered at a time of great social unrest, when the Crown was levying heavy taxes to mobilise its defence forces against the anticipated invasion of the Spanish Armada, the sermon follows the accepted formula of Easter Spital sermons in exhorting the rich of the city to give charitable donations in support of the city's hospitals and orphans. Primarily, however, it is a sermon that engages with the theological controversy over the efficacy of works in the economy of salvation, whereby Andrewes also delivers a lengthy deliberative exhortation, or public essay, on the subject of charitable donations and poor relief in a wider social context. He chose 1 Timothy 4:17–19 as his thematic verse, quoted by Andrewes as '*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not-high minded, that they trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living* GOD. . . *that they may lay hold of eternal life.*'[21] Andrewes then progressed, as was typical of thematic preaching, through a word-by-word meditation and division, with each part of the verse opening up into a wider set of economic, religious, and spiritual exhortations to the rich merchants and aldermen of London.

Singling out as the thematic axis of the sermon the first and last words of the biblical verses, '*Charge*' and '*eternal life*', Andrewes attempted to strike a delicate balance of authority, knowing full well he was preaching on a difficult and unpopular topic during a time of economic duress: 'And let me tell you farther; that it is such a *Charge*, as toucheth your estate in *everlasting life*, the very last words of my Text. That is, the well or evil hearing of this *Charge*, is as much worth as your *eternal life* is worth. And therefore, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*'[22] This last quotation from

[21] The sermon appears in the second part of *XCVI. Sermons*. I have relied here on the text prepared by McCullough for his edition of *Lancelot Andrewes*, p. 40.

[22] McCullough (ed.), *Lancelot Andrewes*., p. 42, quoting Matthew 11:15.

Matthew, with its familiar allusion to Christ's preaching ministry, underscores Andrewes's anxiety in the sermon over his authority to preach a 'charge' to the rich to open their pockets in a gesture of Christ-like egalitarianism. Theologically, it allowed Andrewes to insist on the salvific merit of charitable works in a move that would have placed him far beyond the pale of Calvinist conformity in the late 1580s.

Accordingly, throughout the sermon, Andrewes maintains his self-effacing insistence on his role as a messenger or mediator, by disclaiming direct authorship in the spirit of Augustine's sermons: 'We writ not this *charge*, our pens dealt not it; it was not we that writ it, and it is not we that can blot it out, unless we our selves will be *blotted out of the book of life*.'[23] This clever use of negation reinforces a central conceit of the sermon's spiritual argument, which creates a negative simile between worldly riches and secular courts and the eternal riches to be won in God's court of judgment through the payment, ironically, of real sums of money. In this way, Andrewes throughout the sermon gradually builds up his mediatory role as one who delivers a charge from God, explicates it, and then makes it come alive in his audience's imagination as a haunting worry about the corruption of divine gifts. Andrewes reasons, reflecting on his own implied gifts as an orator, that if the gifts of wisdom and eloquence may be corrupted when applied to worldly affairs (wisdom in counsel, eloquence in persuasion), so much more may worldly '*Riches*', which 'ruleth in them all, ruleth them all, and overruleth them all'.[24]

With this analogy firmly in place, Andrewes launches into a lengthy meditation, or essay, on the uncertainty of riches and worldly goods in the economy of salvation when measured against the very real inequality between rich and poor. This then culminates in an exhortation about the saving power of God's grace, which, in this case, has the power to move the rich, who are blessed with material wealth, to give to the poor so that they can reap eternal rewards in Heaven. Throughout this lengthy sermon, one of the longest in Andrewes's extant corpus, his tone and authority as a speaker who charges and commands moves between set pieces of exegesis, which parse and illuminate each individual word and syntactical unit that make up his chosen thematic verse. Andrewes's rhetorical authority thus recedes even as it gathers force, so that when, in conclusion, he finally returns to the main theme of his text whereby he can 'testify and charge', he disclaims: 'Look not

[23] Ibid., p. 44. [24] Ibid., p. 45.

on me, look on your own souls, and pity on them: Look upon heaven, and the *Lord* of heaven and earth, from whom it commeth, and of whom it will be one day called again.'[25]

Preaching, for Andrewes, was an efficacious sacramental work that bound God, preacher, and hearer within a wider liturgical religious experience. This was first a matter of religious ideology, and only secondarily of style; but it was through style and reasoned rhetorical techniques that Andrewes was able to convey his ideology to his hearers as an *experience* rather than as a remote thought exercise. Preaching at Greenwich in 1607 before King James I on the Gospel of James (1:22), 'And be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves', Andrewes echoed the evangelical commonplace in telling his auditory that a sermon always has three parts: '1. God, 2. the Preacher, 3. and the Hearer'; however, he exposes this familiar division of the sermon in order to drive home his High Church sacramental argument: the salvific importance of works within the evangelical tradition. Hearing the Word is here transformed into what Andrewes terms the very 'Sacrament of godliness', by which that Word is manifest in the flesh, and therefore in acts of worship and piety: 'If that which is heard, be therefore heard that it may be done, and it be not done, a deceit there is, somebody there is deceived, light where it will.'[26] Of the three parts that make up this covenant, therefore, the preacher is the most important because he alone can bind man and God together by receding, as it were, from the role of orator to that of a ministering agent of devotional experience.

It is this role of the preacher as a Christ-like mediator who seeks to bind and move his hearers through a vicarious religious experience, built around textual exegesis and affective rhetoric, which has most in common with the early modern essayists' experiments with modes of authority in dispensing counsel. It is accordingly the main aspect of preaching that was of most relevance to future essayists who looked to printed sermons for inspiration, since in both mediums authority is built into the exercise of exposition or exegesis, rather than merely asserted in the act of writing. This last connection, though surprising, is not arbitrary, and speaks to co-dependent forces of influence, where it could be argued not only that later essayists drew inspiration from preachers, but that some preachers, seeking to train themselves up as speakers for God's 'truth', drew inspiration from Montaigne in testing, or 'essaying', their authorial voice to teach, move, and instruct as exegetes

[25] Ibid., p. 80. [26] Ibid., p. 139.

working from within a rich convergence of patristic, ecclesiastical, and humanistic hermeneutical traditions.

A fascinating test case for this possible influence can be found in Donne's *Essayes in Divinity*, published by his eldest son, John Donne Jr., in 1651, twenty years after his father's death. The essays were written between 1611 and 1615, in the years leading to Donne's entry into the English Church, 'when he had many debates betwixt God and himself, whether he were worthy, and competently learned to enter in Holy Orders'.[27] They constitute a curious text that offers a good example of how a would-be preacher turns to the essay form to reflect on his future vocation. Whether the choice of title was Donne's or added later by his son, the word 'Essayes' to describe a miscellany of exegetical meditations on the first verses of Genesis and Exodus is revealing of the way in which Donne (or his son, or printer) looked to Montaigne's style of writing to label this form of excursion into biblical exegesis.

Although obviously different from Montaigne's essays in subject matter, Donne's *Essayes in Divinity*, as Jeffrey Johnson has shown, are similar in their tentative, searching tone and open-ended sentences whose progression of thought is 'primarily associative'.[28] In this respect, the subtitle of the volume, *Being Several Disquisitions, Interwoven with Meditations and Prayers*, is equally revealing. The term 'disquisitions', referring to lengthy treatises or discourses focusing usually on a single subject of investigation, is meant here to qualify the word 'Essayes', as if the latter is the less familiar term. It guards against the occasional nature of the Montaignian essay in implying that Donne's devotional essays reflect, rather, on a single, scholarly exegetical investigation that is nevertheless 'interwoven' with 'meditations' typical of Montaigne's warm faith-based scepticism, which, in this case, finally yield prayers that do not belong in the essay genre at all. Donne's *Essayes in Divinity* can be seen as a transitional, or liminal work, as if the would-be preacher, sitting 'at the door, and meditat[ing] upon the threshold'[29] relies on the open-ended, non-obligatory essay form to hone his exegetical voice in composing what he then terms suggestively, 'these Sermons', which though 'they have no Auditory, yet . . . I shall be content that oaks and beeches be my scholars, and witnesses of my solitary Meditations'.[30] For Donne, devotional essays and exegetical

[27] J. Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, ed. E.M. Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 4.
[28] J. Johnson, 'The essay' in J. Shami, D. Flynn, and M.T. Hester (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 270.
[29] Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, p. 5. [30] Ibid., p. 41.

disquisitions are non-vocal sermons, which might be said of any printed sermon that we read and vocalise silently.

Donne, like Andrewes, spent a long career building up his preacherly authority at the pulpit, cultivating what Jeanne Shami has aptly described as his preaching ethic of 'nearness', as one who looks into his hearers' consciences not to judge, but to better move them closer into the unity of God's love.[31] As Donne puts it in a sermon preached in 1624 on Psalm 31:11 ('Come ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord'), 'Faith comes by hearing, saith the Apostle; but it is by the hearing of the soul, *Hearkening, Considering*.'[32] Once again, we return to the idea that for a soul to 'hearken', what is required is wisdom, not eloquence. Donne goes on to say that the office of the preacher to move, and therefore to save, through oratory relies not on '*Invention*, and *Disposition*, and *Art*, and *Eloquence*, and *Expression*, and *Elocution*, and *reading*, and *writing*, and *printing*', which are 'secondary things', but on the inspired ethics of ministry and stewardship: 'men may account us, and make account of us, as of *Orators* in the pulpit, and of *Authors*, in the shop; but if they account us of *Ministers and Stewards*, they give us our due'.[33] Nevertheless, it was in the workshop and pulpit of authorship and oratory that such ministry found its voice in relation to God's Word in Donne's *Essayes*.

The opening word of the volume is 'I', as Donne, alone with himself, tests his own authority, the voice of his ministry, in the silence of prose meditation. Looking towards the door of scriptural exegesis with humility and fears of inadequacy, he hopes at best to beg 'the crums' of the 'reverend Divines, who by an ordinary calling are Officers and Commissioners from God', for whom 'the great Doors are open'.[34] This posture is not ironic as much as it is deliberately and piously self-effacing. It draws on what Katrin Ettenhuber has identified as a confessional Augustinian attitude of piety, fostering habits of reading and interpretation, which 'force the gaze inward and encourage spiritual introspection'; she argues that Donne's 'professional self-fashioning' as a preacher 'and inward contemplation are inextricably linked'.[35]

[31] J. Shami, 'The sermon' in J. Shami et al. (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, 327. See also J. Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 132–3.
[32] J. Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G.R. Potter and E.M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–62), vol. 6, p. 102.
[33] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 103. [34] Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, p. 5.
[35] K. Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 109.

It is this unique temper, tentatively hovering between the experiential scepticism of an essay and the confidence of inspired preaching, that compels Donne in the *Essayes* to shy away from what he terms overzealous 'curiosity' in his display of exegetical authority. Looking, for example, to Moses as both the model of the 'first Author' to receive God's scripture (whether or not indeed he deserves that primacy), he finds him also the subsequent object of overly curious patristic queries. Donne inserts himself into this exemplum of authorship, drawing both on the alleged primacy of Moses and the subsequent debate over the truth of this claim. Citing and then avoiding various arid controversies concerning the primacy of Moses as God's first surrogate 'author', Donne points to what for him is finally a personal, subjective question about the limits of exegetical inquiry into such questions. He considers how, by and through biblical exegesis, his own authority as a preacher of the Word is fashioned:

> And besides, when I remember that it was God which hid *Moses*'s body, And the Devil which laboured to reveal it, I use it thus, that there are some things which the Author of light hides from us, and the prince of darkness strives to shew to us; but with no other light, than his firebrands of Contention, and curiosity.[36]

Donne's pious rejection of the sort of curiosity that breeds the 'firebrands of Contention' is finally doctrinal and speaks to his inclusive, non-irenic vision for the English Protestant church, but it also purposefully belies his genuine intellectual inquisitiveness and searching intelligence which is nothing if not curious.

This curiosity and relentless searching after an elusive salvific truth, which finds expression in Donne's *Essayes* as a hybrid exegetical essay form, can be traced through Donne's entire preaching career. It goes some way to explain the deep engagement that Donne achieves with his hearers precisely on these points of self-doubt and salvific assurance. Early modern sermons, we may conclude, are not Montaignian essays, but preachers like Donne drew inspiration from this new generic form in teasing out new modes of subjective expression within the sacred frame of pulpit oratory. In like manner, no doubt, subsequent essayists benefited from reading printed sermons, finding in them fitting exercises in the construction of mediated authority between written words and the truths they lay claim to.

[36] Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, p. 13.

6

Anger, Rhetoric, and Early Women Essayists

MERVE EMRE

What is anger? How is it expressed? How do its distinct forms, genres, and mediums of expression circulate in the public sphere? These questions are crucial to post-Habermasian theorists who argue that anger and its manifestations, including 'outbursts, becoming aggravated, or withdrawing' from polite discussion, constitute 'an integral part of the public sphere', one that exceeds its interlocutors' exercise of communicative reason.[1] Many of these theorists locate anger in contemporary, non-Western spaces, thereby implicitly ceding the assumption of rationality and dispassionate discourse to the West and its philosophical traditions. This chapter argues that no such concession should be made, especially not when one considers the prolific writings of women – polemicists, pamphleteers, essayists, and critics – in the early modern public sphere. It will be my contention that anger is not just one emotion among the many that receive public airing by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women. Rather, anger is the discursive terrain on which the most essential aspects of publicity are articulated and contested prior to publicity's emergence in the eighteenth century as a notionally bourgeois and masculine phenomenon.[2]

Anger surfaces in pseudonyms like Jane Anger, Mary Tattle-well, and Joan Hit-Him-Home, writers of pamphlets that offered a different generic lineage for essayistic prose than the tradition of belles-lettres. The anger that compels women to write, and to frame their writing as more honest, judicious, and wise than the prose of the men who slander them, is thematised explicitly in *Jane Anger, her Protection for Women* (1589), Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), and, more subtly, in Margaret Cavendish's *The World's*

[1] U. Okeja, 'Palaver and consensus as metaphors for the public sphere' in L.K. Jenco, M. Idris, and M.C. Thomas (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 576.

[2] M. Warner, 'Publics and counterpublics', *Public Culture*, 14:1 (Winter 2002), 77.

Olio (1655) and *The Blazing World* (1666). To read these women essayists is to observe the transformation of anger from an accusation associated with unruliness, excess, immediacy, ephemerality, and the allegedly inferior linguistic and cultural capacities of women, into a series of conventions stipulating the forms and styles in which women write. These conventions project a wider, more attentive audience and a growing scene of circulation for genres of speech and writing coded as feminine.

Anger at Rhetoric

In one sense, anger is a dated problem for the intersection of feminist and early modernist literary criticism. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the *querelle des femmes*, or 'woman debate', as critics have called it, invoked anger to characterise the source and the style of female authorship – and, at times, to insist that these authors spoke on behalf of, or represented a unified subject position confidently identified as 'Woman'. This was not without its problems, both theoretical and historical. Surveying the intersection of feminism and early modern studies in 1992, two years after the publication of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Diane Purkiss noted that anger, outrage, fervour, and passion 'are recognizable key words in the rhetoric of certain kinds of radical feminism which characteristically valorize the emotions of rebellion': 'Early feminism becomes an enabling pretext for the production of feminism now. Such reading strategies necessarily lead to an assumption that texts signed by women were indeed the work of women; the language of criticism reveals a desire for material girls, women as real as ourselves.'[3] By Purkiss's logic, the collapse of past into present made for bad politics because it compressed the evolving continuum of gender into a single and consistent subject position. It made for bad criticism because variously sophisticated textual strategies – allusion, irony, satire – become occluded by the political interest in shoring up the early modern figure of 'Woman'.

Yet, thirty years after feminist critics urged vigilance against a blunt and unhelpful presentism, anger continues to preoccupy critics invested in producing feminism as a transhistorical discourse of emotion, supercharged with the potential for oppositional politics and the assertion of agency.[4] How the

[3] D. Purkiss, 'Material girls: the seventeenth-century woman debate' in C. Brant and D. Purkiss (eds.), *Women, Texts, Histories, 1575–1760* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 70.

[4] See, e.g., S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *Still Mad: American Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021). For a non-academic argument concerning

symbolic expression of anger, whether in the form of a pamphlet or a pussy hat, brings about political rebellion or feminist emancipation is a difficulty such critics leave untouched. Contrarily, I propose that 'the women debate' in which early modern essayists participated was not primarily or exclusively a site of the kind of voluntarist political activity that can be read and redeemed through the feminist frameworks of our time. Instead, it was the occasion and thematic by which writers of various genders interrogated the reflexive dimensions of reading, writing, and speaking in the nascent public sphere.

Anger's original object was not misogyny, at least not overtly. Rather, it was the practice of rhetoric, the scholarly art of using language, especially moral proclamations, commonplaces, figures of speech, and other compositional techniques, to persuade or influence one's interlocutors.[5] As Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne observe in the introduction to their fascinating collection, *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, the primary locus of rhetorical instruction was the early modern grammar school, whose educational agenda stressed the cultivation of eloquence in letter writing, pamphleteering, and poetry, not oral disputation as the pedagogues of ancient Rome would have had it.[6]

Drawing on Patricia Parker's meticulous reconstruction of rhetorical manuals and schoolbooks in her 'Spelling Backwards' in their volume, Richards and Thorne situate early modern women's writing within the conditions of sixteenth-century primary and secondary education. Specifically, they connect it to the unequal distribution of rhetorical training between men and women, the latter of whom would have had no access to the schools attended by boys of middling rank, and only sporadic access to the private tutoring enjoyed by children of the aristocracy. Such inequality was justified and encouraged by educators who claimed that any training in public disputation, either oral or written, would have decidedly negative effects on women's decorum. 'To her neither the intricacies of debate nor the

anger's political efficacy, see R. Traister, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

[5] On norms of classical rhetoric associated with British education, see T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme' and J. Klancher's 'The academic essay: rhetoric and pedagogy' in this volume (Chs. 21 and 20, respectively).

[6] J. Richards and A. Thorne, Introduction to *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Richards and Thorne (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–24. See also J.C. Mann, 'Arts of rhetoric: antique and modern' in K. Poole and L. Shohet (eds.), *Gathering Force, Early Modern British Literature in Transition, 1557–1623* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 88–106.

oratorical artifices of action and delivery are of the least practical use, if indeed they are not positively unbecoming. Rhetoric in all its forms – public discussion, forensic argument, logical fence, and the like – lies absolutely outside the province of women', wrote Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni in the fifteenth century.[7] Richard Brathwait echoed Bruni's sentiments in his 1631 conduct manual, *The English Gentlewoman*: 'As modesty gives best grace to your behavior, so moderation of *Speech* to your discourse'[8] – a moderation secured by refusing women access to the stylistic techniques that would lend a fearful artifice, excess, or force to what they said or wrote.

If the school set the terms for the exclusion of women from both rhetorical training and the early modern public sphere, then these exclusions were retroactively justified by male pamphleteers like Joseph Swetnam, writing pamphlets like *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615) that helped put into circulation the trope of female speech and thought as disordered, garrulous, and quick to take offence. Such discourse, by its very nature, therefore, was resistant to an education that was, as a point of fact, already being denied to women. The irony, of course, was that this argument was presented through rhetorical tactics to which these men had primary or exclusive access. Here, for instance, is Swetnam demonstrating his mastery of *captatio benevolentiae* (the rhetorical practice of commandeering the goodwill of an audience, or buttering them up) by inverting it in a fiendishly proleptic act of *captatio malevolentiae*. 'I know I shall be bitten by many because I touch many, but before I go any further, let me whisper one word in your ears, and that is this: whatsoever you think privately, I wish you to conceal it with silence, lest in starting up to find fault you prove yourself guilty of those monstrous accusations which are here following against some women', he warns. 'I deal with you after the manner of a shrew, which cannot otherwise ease her cursed heart but by her unhappy tongue.'[9] His address to women readers is a pre-emptive act of quietening them. Anticipating their (in fact) angry response to his accusatory,

[7] L. Bruni, 'The tractate of Leonardo Bruni d'Arezzo, *De Studiis et Litteris*' in W.H. Woodward (ed.), *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963), p. 126.

[8] R. Brathwait, *The English Gentlevvoman, Drawne out to the Full Body Expressing, what Habiliments doe Best Attire Her, what Ornaments doe best Adorne Her, what Complements doe Best Accomplish Her* (London: M. Sparke, 1631), p. 90.

[9] J. Swetnam, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women; or, the Vanity of Them, Choose You Whether: With a Commendation of Wise, Vertuous and Honest Women: Pleasant for Married Men, Profitable for Young Men, and Hurtfull to None* (London: T. Archer, 1615), sig. B1r.

exaggerated pamphlet, he claims that anger will only serve to prove his argument: that women are an angry, irrational, shrewish lot. Since any revelation of negative emotion, however deserved or proportionate, will be used against women, the only logically available response is for them either to agree with Swetnam's assessment of their vices or to stay silent, letting his wanton speech reign unchecked.

How were women to express themselves when their utterances were condemned before they ever opened their mouths, their writing censured before they ever set quill to pen pot, rag paper, or parchment? Richards and Thorne suggest that the contemporary critical response to the historical exclusion of women should be to broaden the concept of rhetoric to include the feminised genre of 'gossip' and its gauche, ineloquent, or exaggerated utterances – what the authors describe as the style of 'untutored persuasiveness' specific to women orators and essayists. This is a well-intentioned, if ultimately misguided, attempt to right a wrong that cannot, in any meaningful sense, be rectified. The authors' attempt to claim rhetoric's socially and culturally elevated status for women by expanding its definition is motivated by the political desires of the present. Yet it only ends up occluding the historical calibration of linguistic devices, scholastic training, and gendered ideologies that women's pamphlets took as the foremost target of their anger. It would be more productive to read the writing of early women essayists as commanding styles and genres of expression that deliberately exceeded, or placed themselves outside of, rhetoric's technical and institutional ambit, as well as its aesthetic and social discourses of valuation.

Jane Anger

The pamphlet titled *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women: To defend them against the Scandalous Reportes of a Late Surfeiting Lover, and all Other Like Venerians that Complaine so to bee Overcloyed with Womens Kindnesse* (1589) responds to another pamphlet published one year earlier, *Boke his surfeit in Love, with a farewel to the folies of his own phantasie*, of which no copies are known to survive. But, based on *Jane Anger*'s allusions to it, the author had attacked women for their lustfulness and dishonesty.[10] In responding to this attack, the writer's choice of the pseudonym 'Anger' seems to signal, from

[10] Ja.: A Gent, *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women: To defend them against the Scandalous Reportes of a Late Surfeiting Lover, and all Other Like Venerians that Complaine so to bee Overcloyed with Womens Kindnesse* (London: R. Jones & T. Orwin, 1589), sig. A1v.

the outset, the writer's intention to flout the first rule of Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*: 'It is not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger or envy or pity – one might as well warp a carpenter's rule before using it.'[11]

However, the degree to which Jane Anger will flout this rule depends on whom she imagines to be her audience. The pamphlet begins by hailing, first, 'the gentlewomen of England', or those aristocratic women likely to be patrons of pamphleteers like 'herself':

> Gentlewomen, though it is to be feared that your settled wits wil advisedly condemn that, which my choleric vein hath rashly set down, and so perchance, ANGER shall reap anger for not agreeing with diseased persons: Yet (if with indifference of censure, you consider of the head of the quarrel) I hope you will rather show your selves defendants of the defender's title, than complainants of the plaintiff's wrong.[12]

Although the first address presents itself as a pre-emptive apology for what the writer's 'choleric vein hath rashly set down', it is not itself angry in tone. It is notably measured, muted even – unruffled, self-reflective, and, most important, framed as a case that is being presented, as she later puts it, to the 'just minds' and 'settled wits' of the members of a jury. The writer of *Jane Anger* would have been aware that even women who belonged to the aristocracy could not legally serve on juries in the sixteenth century. Her metaphor suggests that the public sphere may function as, or be transmuted into, an extrajudicial court; call it the court of public opinion. Within this imaginary scene of administered justice, it is not a distinctive person called Jane Anger who stands trial, but 'ANGER', an emotion available to her readers, even the decorous gentlewomen whom she has anointed law givers and enforcers. For these gentlewomen to accept Jane Anger's protection is not just to refrain from censuring the writer for her extremity or rashness. It is also to protect themselves in anticipation of the day that 'ANGER', their anger, may arise as the object of rebuke.

By using her command of logic to ensure that her display of 'rashness' and 'extremity' will not boomerang back onto her in the form of her aristocratic readers' anger, the narrator of 'Jane Anger' is free to direct 'ANGER', an anger now shared with her audience, towards its proper object. Her second

[11] Aristotle, 'Rhetoric' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, revised ed., 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 2152.

[12] Ja., *Jane Anger*, sig. A2v. All quotations from this pamphlet have been modernised for ease of reading.

prefatory address is made to 'all women in general, and gentle reader whatsoever':

> Fie on the falsehood of men, whose minds go oft a madding, & whose tongues cannot so soon be wagging, but straight they fall a railing . . . Let the streams of the channels in London streets run so swiftly, as they may be able alone to carry them from that sanctuary. Let the stones be as Ice, the soles of their shoes as Glass, the ways steep like Ætna, & every blast a Whirl-wind puffed out of Boreas's long throat, that these may hasten their passage to the Devil's haven.[13]

More exaggerated than the anger directed at 'the falsehood of men' is the punishment Anger metes out in response to their abuse, slander, and railing. It is a punishment that demonstrates, above all, the author's firm grasp of learned references – to Mount 'Ætna' and to Boreas, the purple-winged god of the north wind, who will hasten men's passage from London 'to the Devil's haven'. At the centre of a city purged of its men stands Jane Anger, and to her side, she summons all women to aid and assist her. Her address simultaneously secures their agency and offers herself to them as their agent, their representative, their voice, and, as she signs herself, their 'friend'.

Her addresses made and her audience's friendship secured, Anger's protection officially begins with an indictment of the rhetorical training that encourages men to commit themselves to writing and teaches them to write in a false style. 'The desire that every man hath to show his true vein in writing is unspeakable', Anger writes, 'and their minds are so carried away with the manner, as no care at all is had of the matter: they run so into Rhetoric, as often times they overrun the bounds of their own wits, and go they know not whither.'[14] Rhetoric introduces a curious gap between feeling and expression, between 'matter' and 'manner', that leaves men with 'sore overburdened heads', 'their wits whetted, and their brains almost broken'; their egos inflated by conceit and 'conceits' to such a preposterous, laughable degree that 'they suppose that there is not one amongst us who can, or dare reprove their slanders and false reproaches', not one who will 'write to reprove their lying lips', Anger explains. The sheer fact of her writing serves as the first puncture wound to the mannered arrogance conferred by rhetoric.

Anger ridicules the poor execution of these men's arguments, which prioritise 'stile' over logic. Boke's pamphlet, as she represents it, chastises

[13] Ibid., sig. A3r. [14] Ibid., sig. A3v.

women for their ability to tempt and bamboozle men into love affairs and chastises men for allowing themselves to be bamboozled. Anger readily grants that Boke's sentences are 'pithie', his words 'pure', his style 'pleasing'. But his premises are dishonest, his conclusions faulty, and his education leaves much to be desired. Her audience need look no further, she insists, than prideful Ninus, hedonistic Sardanapalus, and lustful Menelaus to see how the 'flattery of men's false hearts' leads to their justifiable ends: cuckoldry and murder. 'Thus, shall go my verdict', she exclaims, before pronouncing her linked moral judgments of the ancients. Showing herself to be superior to Boke in both learned references, Anger shifts the attention of the court of public opinion. Whereas her readers' eyes were once trained on the writer herself, now they examine the men who use their words – words less refined, if cooler or more playful, than hers – to dissemble and to conquer women, to bring them low in the pursuit of their own pleasures. Much of the rest of *Jane Anger* will be devoted to examples of the lecherousness of men. Her judgments and censures of them will be ornamented with Latin commonplaces and marked by prosodic outbursts that mock her interlocutor and press her point: rhetoric cannot be persuasive in the absence of an honest reckoning with the nature of the sexes.

What is the nature of women for Jane Anger? Interspersed with these examples is a delightfully perverse analysis of the essential power dynamics that resulted in patriarchy, in men being made the head of the household, the Church, and the state. 'The Gods knowing that the minds of mankind would be aspiring, and having thoroughly viewed the wonderful virtues wherewith women are enriched, lest they should provoke us to pride, and so confound us with Lucifer, they bestowed the supremacy over us to man', Anger writes.[15] The problem is not that women are seductresses whose moral weakness and physical desirability lead men to folly, as Boke's pamphlet proposes. Rather, it is that women are too good, too virtuous, too reasonable, too moderate. For God to have given them sovereignty would only have rendered them prideful – devilishly so, Anger concludes. To further this point, she calls to her assistance first Plato, then the Bible:

> Plato's answer to a Vicar of fools which asked the question, being, that he knew not whether to place women among those creatures which were reasonable or unreasonable ... that even then in his age, much more in those ages which should after follow, men were grown to be so

[15] Ibid., sig. B1r.

> unreasonable, as he could not decide whether men or brute beasts were more reasonable . . . The creation of man and woman at the first, he being formed in principio of dross and filthy clay, did so remain until God saw that in him his workmanship was good, and therefore by the transformation of the dust which was loathsome unto flesh, it became purified. Then lacking a help for him, GOD making woman of man's flesh, that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show, how far we women are more excellent than men.[16]

Here we may begin to see how the alleged genre of Anger's pamphlet, the protection, is enhanced by her logic that women are superior to men.

The letter of protection was a document issued by official sources to guarantee safe passage or to extend a charter of invitation. It was marked by the seal and thus the power of the monarch. Jane Anger's protection, which is by no means sanctioned by the power of the state, is instead marked by the seal of women's superior nature. It is signed by a woman's hand, of purer flesh than that of men. It insists on women's capacity to serve as the salvation of mankind biologically, through reproduction. More importantly, it insists on women's capacity to serve as the saviours of one another intellectually, in the court of public opinion. *Jane Anger* makes it clear that what women need protection from is not their own anger, but those 'brute beasts', who, when women will not yield to their monstrous desires, use rhetoric to project their appetites onto the weaker sex.

Rachel Speght

Rachel Speght's 1617 *A Mouzell* [muzzle] *for Melastomus* announces its intention in its title. It will attempt to silence 'the Cynical Baiter of, and foul mouthed Barker against, Eve's sex', Joseph Swetnam, a man possessed by his 'black (or foul) mouth'.[17] Unlike Anger, who decries rhetoric to establish a court of public opinion that bends to her distinctive standards of logic and judgment, Speght will take a different tack. She will criticise Swetnam as an 'irreligious' and 'illiterate' student of not only rhetoric, but also grammar and

[16] Ibid., sig. B3v.

[17] The translation of 'Melastomus' as 'Black (or foul) mouth' comes from C. Luckyj, 'Rachel Speght: *A Mouzell for Melastomus* 1617' in H. Ostovich and E. Sauer (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550–1700* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 70.

logic, the other branches of the *trivium*, the classical education men would have encountered in the early modern schools.[18]

From the beginning of her address, which invokes Aristotle, Seneca, and scripture, she will situate her reader in the schoolroom and position herself as a substitute teacher:

> In which excrement of your roaring cogitations you have used such irregularities touching concordance, and observed so disordered a method, as I doubt not to rely on, that a very Accidence scholar would have quite put you down in both . . . for you, being greedy to botch up your mingle mangle invective against Women; have not therein observed, in many places, so much [as] Grammar sense. But the emptiest Barrell makes the loudest sound; and so we will account of you.[19]

Speght's reader is invited to sit quietly among the other students and listen to Speght scold Swetnam while the 'Accidence scholar', the grammar teacher, looks over her shoulder, approving her actions. As with the distinction Anger draws between matter and manner, there is a disproportion noted between the quality of Swetnam's thought and the magnitude or amplitude of it, which Speght conveys in the wonderfully tart metaphor of the emptiest barrel making the loudest sound. Debating later in the passage whether she should 'bestow so good a name as the Dunce upon you', she opts instead to stop playing the teacher and to start playing the preacher. Rather than banish the male pamphleteer to the corner of the schoolroom, she will send him straight to Hell, where he may serve as a 'scribe to the Devil'. (It should be noted that Speght was the daughter of a Calvinist minister.)

The governing metaphor of Speght's preacherly tract is not the man as an empty, unsounding barrel but man as the snarling, slinking animal in the Garden of Eden. Against Swetnam's roaring, disorderly, and poisonous words, his animal bark and howl, Speght contrasts God's reason for creating Eve: her superior capacity for speech and her ability to converse, commune, and work with Adam: 'To avoid that solitary condition that he was then in, having none to commerce or converse withal dumb creatures, it seemed good unto the Lord, that as of every creature he had made male and female, and man only being alone without mate, to form a help meet for him.'[20]

[18] R. Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex, or, An Apologeticall Answere to that Irreligious and Illiterate Pamphlet Made by Jo. Sw. and by him Intituled, the Arraignement of women* (London: T. Archer, 1617), sig. A1r; text modernised for ease of reading.

[19] Ibid., sig. A4r–A4v. [20] Ibid., p. 2.

Why should man need a woman to help him craft his conversation? Swetnam's pamphlet seems to provide the implicit answer to this question. Left to their own devices, men are no better than animals. Their conversation skews away from the expressive practices of sympathy and productive labour that Speght details and towards what Anger calls 'railing' and Speght calls 'baiting'. Railing and baiting are forms of utterance whose purpose is to elicit an exaggerated response, initiating an exchange presumed to be contentious from the outset and to remain contentious for as long as the exchange can be made to last. The performative function of baiting is to put the speaker and respondent into a relation where no previous one existed, just as a worm on a hook draws a fish into a new and dangerous relation with the man who holds the line. There appears to be nothing generative about baiting; it is an idle pastime, a leisure activity – the early modern equivalent of trolling today – rather than a productive or scholastic one. And it infects its respondent with a similar sense of idleness or pointlessness. 'Any judicious Reader may plainly see, that the Baiter of Women's pestiferous obtrectation [slander] is like a Tailor's Cushion . . . I would have been loath to have spent time so idly, as to answer it all', writes Speght.

Speght justifies spending her time so idly by framing her defence of women's speech as a continuation of it in its best and most productive form, that is, in the service of praising God and preaching purposeful worship of him. While the first half of Speght's pamphlet is dedicated to a sober refutation of Swetnam's account of Genesis and Eve's responsibility for the Fall, the most interesting part of *A Mouzell for Melastomus* – and the angriest – is when she turns in the second half of the pamphlet to extol the causes of woman's creation. The final of the four causes she enumerates concerns the 'end, for which woman was made, to glorify God' by 'using her body, and all the parts, powers, and faculties thereof, as instruments for his honour':

> As with her voice to sound forth his praises; like *Meriam*, and the rest of her company; with her tongue not to utter words of strife, but to give good counsel unto her husband, the which he must not despise. For *Abraham* was bidden to give ear to *Sarah* his wife . . . Her heart should be a receptacle for God's Word, like *Mary* that treasured up the sayings of CHRIST in her heart.[21]

By Speght's argument, to insult the speech of women is to insult the instrument God constructed to glorify his powers. It is to sneer at the voice

[21] Ibid., p. 11.

he endowed her with to praise him, to mock the tongue he authorised to give good counsel, and to shatter her heart, which serves as 'a receptacle for God's Word'. Writing is not mentioned here, but God's Word is carried to the public as forcefully by Speght's words as it would have been by the prophetess Miriam's song to God after Moses parted the sea, or the matriarch Sarah's counsel to her husband Abraham. Unlike Swetnam – idler, hypocrite, dunce, and scribe for the Devil – Speght practises what she preaches. Far from merely taking the bait, she turns it into an occasion to prove the cause of her own creation: the glorification of God.

Baiting women, Speght suggests, is thus an act of ingratitude against God, a rejection of his grace and his gift. The suggestion is proffered by a series of rhetorical questions that constitute the powerful final section of the pamphlet, its 'epilogue or upshot of the premises'. 'What greater discredit can redound to a workman, than to have the man, for whom he hath made it, say, it is naught?' Speght asks. 'And what greater ingratitude can be showed unto GOD than the opprobrious speeches and disgraceful invectives, which some diabolical natures do frame against women?' Yet what God giveth, God can take away from these diabolical natures. *A Mouzell for Melastomus* ends with the hope that God will have his vengeance on the 'Bayter of women' by removing his capacity for speech altogether, given that he has proven himself unable to direct it to good purposes. As a result, she pronounces, 'they shall plainly perceive, that it had been better for them to have been born dumb and lame, than to have used their tongs and hands, the one in repugning, the other in writing against Gods handy work.'[22] Man will revert to the same state as the idle, speechless animals that once kept him company, prior to God's creation of Eve.

Margaret Cavendish

What if there had been no orators, rhetoricians, logicians, or grammarians to poison the well of language, or if their powers had been significantly curtailed in the schools? This is the fantasy entertained by Margaret Cavendish in her 1666 romance, *The Blazing World*. A woman is kidnapped from her seaside home by a man who has fallen in love with her. The boat he spirits her away in is caught in a tempest, and, after the men steering it drown or freeze to death, she is carried northward into a fantastical world

[22] Ibid., n.p.

populated by strange creatures: bear-men, worm-men, fish-men, fly-men, ape-men, fox-men, spider-men, lice-men, jackdaw-men, magpie-men, and parrot-men. When the emperor falls in love with the woman and makes her his empress, she organises the creatures into schools and professions. The jackdaw-, magpie-, and parrot-men are her orators and logicians. Their appearance before her is not a success:

> Whereupon one of the Parrot-men rose with great formality, and endeavoured to make an Eloquent Speech before her Majesty; but before he had half ended, his arguments and divisions being so many, that they caused a great confusion in his brain, he could not go forward, but was forced to retire backward, with great disgrace both to himself, and the whole society ... At which the Empress appear'd not a little troubled, and told them, That they followed too much the Rules of Art, and confounded themselves with too nice formalities and distinctions.[23]

The polemic of the early modern pamphlet is transformed into the 'fancy' of the early modern novel, a form which also abandoned the Aristotelian 'rules of art' dictating the generic and stylistic conventions of verbal artworks. Only a trace of anger remains in the countenance of the empress, who 'appear'd not a little troubled' by the disgraceful performance of the parrot-men. Yet she is placated when they decide to forsake their training and rely on their 'naturally voluble tongues', their 'natural Eloquence'.

Ten years before *The Blazing World*, the decline of rhetoric had served as the framing argument of Cavendish's *The World's Olio* (1655), a strange, sprawling book that we might think of as the first essay collection by a woman. The preface to the miscellany begins by judging the writing and speaking of women to be weak, irregular, and unpleasant, an assessment that seems to parrot the proclamations of the early modern humanist educators. 'Womens tongues are like stings of bees; and what man would endure our effeminate monarchy to swarm about their ears?' she wondered; 'Women can never have so strong judgment nor clear understanding nor so perfect rhetoric, to speak orations with that eloquence, as to persuade so forcibly, to command so powerfully, to entice so subtly, and to insinuate so gently and softly into the souls of men.'[24] Some critics have perceived in these statements a latent anti-feminism. Yet, as Jane Donawerth has observed, Cavendish issued her judgments at a time when women aristocrats and

[23] M. Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 159.
[24] M. Cavendish, *The World's Olio* (London: A. Maxwell, 1671), n.p.; text of this early edition modernised for fluency.

salonnières, among them Madeleine de Scudéry, Margaret Fell, and Mary Astell, were using classical rhetorical tracts to develop a style of buzzy, sophisticated conversation and letter writing.[25] In *Les Femmes Illustres* (1642), de Scudéry insists that 'conversation is the bond of all humane Society, the greatest pleasure of well-bred People'.[26] She continues: 'I have not thought that the Eloquence of a Lady should be the same [as] a Master of Arts.' Rather, 'the delicacy of art' for a woman's speech and writing derived from her 'making believe there is none at all'.[27] Instead, women were urged to engage in spontaneous and apparently unformed acts of literacy.

As we see in a brief section of *The World's Olio* titled 'Oratours', the rhetorical imperfections of women are neither to be lamented nor to be rectified. Rather, they establish a distinct set of standards for the formation of new speaking and writing publics, which are presented as more intellectually flexible and emotionally astute than the publics instantiated by classical rhetorical techniques. Like the parrot-man, who throws into disrepute his profession by confounding his thought with his 'artificial periods, connexions, and parts of speech', the finicky orators we encounter in *The World's Olio* are 'seldom wise men', Cavendish suggests. 'They study so much of the words, as they consider not the matter', she writes, echoing Anger and Speght's distinction between manner and matter.[28] Yet even when the manner of speech and writing is prioritised, the training imparted by the ancients proves too stilted to satisfy an ear that has been trained on informal talk, such as expected in polite conversation, rather than on highly formalised scenes of public address. 'In such a case as the ear is more to be desired than the understanding', Cavendish writes, 'They must speak composedly, for rhetoric is choosing words fitted to such a subject, and though study and society sweetens language; yet if it have not a natural elegance, it shall not work so strongly upon the senses.'[29]

If *The World's Olio* explicitly theorises a gendered style of orality, then the form of the book implicitly models the 'natural elegance' that rhetorical training disciplines and suppresses. There are hundreds of topics treated in the books of *The World's Olio*, ranging from fame to poetry, romance, comedy, translation, music, dancing, courts, tyrants, wars, and rebellion. The topics are loosely grouped together, although the connections between them are very rarely spelled out. There are few artificial periods, and the

[25] J. Donawerth, 'Conversation and the boundaries of public discourse in rhetorical theory by Renaissance women', *Rhetorica*, 16:2 (1998), 181–99.
[26] M. de Scudéry, *Les Femmes Illustres or the Heroick Harrangues of the Illustrious Women*, trans. J. Innes (Edinburgh: T. Brown, J. Glen, & J. Weir, 1681), sig. A3.
[27] Ibid. [28] Cavendish, *World's Olio*, n.p. [29] Ibid.

rules of grammar are only inconsistently followed. Cavendish's prose is not structured along the lines of an argument. Rather, it presents a series of allegories, epistles, and short essays that each appear to convey an essential truth about the subject on which Cavendish has happened to land.

In a section entitled 'Of the Labyrinth of Fancy', she offers a subtle gloss on her choice to organise *The World's Olio* as she does:

> The reason why men run in such obscure conceits, is, because they think their wit will be esteemed, and seem more when it lies an odd and unusual way, which makes their verse not like a smooth running stream; but as if they were shelves of sand, or rocks in the way, and though the water in those places goes with more force, and makes a greater sound: yet it goes hard and uneasy . . . besides they do not only move passions, but make passions, for a right poetical wit turns hard and rough nature, to a soft, gentle, and kind disposition: for verses are fine fancies, which are spun in the imagination to a small and even thread, but some are worse spinsters than others.[30]

What is true for verse may hold equally true for prose, and vice versa. (Indeed, setting aside their lineation as prose, several sections of *The World's Olio* are almost indifferentiable from Cavendish's verses.) *The World's Olio* presents us with a 'smooth running stream', or, if we can forgive Cavendish her stacking of metaphors, with a finely spun web of fancies. Yet what is doubly intriguing about Cavendish's claim is its social critique of rhetoric's aesthetics. 'The reason why men run in such obscure conceits', she argues, is because they know that difficulty and oddity are taken – or by Cavendish's logic, mistaken – as indicative of 'wit'. These men have no ability to either 'move' or 'make passions'; they are posturers, not polemicists.

Far from granting rhetoric's techniques their ability to invoke strong emotions (however degraded or suspect these emotions may be), Cavendish insists on rhetoric's emotional falsity and aesthetic impoverishment. Thus, in a short essay called 'Of the Variety of Wit', she writes: 'Mercury is feigned the Patron of Thieves, because Mercury is eloquent, and eloquence steals away the hearts of men by consenting to follow after the persuasions of rhetoric.'[31] Are her judgments weak, her understanding hazy, her rhetoric imperfect, her orations ineloquent? Perhaps. But the rules of rhetoric are no longer the rules by which an emergent class of women essayists need abide. And anyway, Cavendish knows that she has begun *The World's Olio* by inoculating herself against such criticism. She will not let herself be wounded. She will not let herself get angry.

[30] Ibid., p. 20. [31] Ibid., p. 242.

7

The Polemical Essay in Pamphlets, Newsbooks, and Periodicals

ANDREW BENJAMIN BRICKER AND
MARISSA NICOSIA

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British essay was a fluid and malleable form – to use a polyvalent early modern term, it was profoundly 'fugitive'. An essay could be deeply topical, fleeting, and perishable, taking up ephemeral and occasional matters, and it could easily travel across media and from reader to reader in the coffeehouses of Enlightenment London. But the same fugitive form could also accommodate weightier matters, as in the philosophical essays of Francis Bacon. The early British essay, as Caroline Levine might characterise it, was a flexible form possessing multiple affordances, those 'potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs'.[1] This chapter offers an overview of how writers exploited the affordances of the essay in pamphlets and newsbooks from the seventeenth century and in the emergent periodicals of the early eighteenth century.

This chapter will focus on the rhetorical qualities of these essays, viewing them, after William R. Jones, as an 'activistic art' that sought to shape public perceptions and promote political intervention on the part of readers.[2] It will also attend to the material forms that authors employed, because the media in which these essays circulated potentially posed financial and legal risks, not only to the essayists, but also to their printers and publishers. Our argument unfolds in three parts. The first section traces the origins of the English newsbook within a media ecology shaped by the edicts of the Star Chamber, an elite court composed of Privy Counsellors and common-law judges, and by the regulations of the Stationers' Company.[3] As a case study in stylistic innovation and rhetorical self-fashioning, we examine the essayistic writings of Marchamont Nedham across a range of newsbooks and pamphlets.

[1] C. Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 6.
[2] W.R. Jones, *Satire in the Elizabethan Age: An Activistic Art* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 15.
[3] Multigraph Collective, *Interacting with Print: Elements of Reading in the Era of Print Saturation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 10–11.

We then turn to the changes enabled by the licensing era (1662–95) and, ultimately, the rise of the periodical press in the decades immediately following the collapse of pre-publication censorship in 1695. From the 1660s through to the 1730s, British writers creatively adapted the form of the essay, finding in the emergent print media of this period a ready site for politics and polemic.

This was a period when civil war and social revolution spurred writers to engage in pressing political debates through essayistic writing at the same time as standard practices in the book trade and the legal regulation of the press shaped the material forms and rhetorical styles of pamphlets and periodicals. In both legal and illegal forms of print, authors excavated abstract political principles while also inspiring readers to direct action. The pamphlet would continue to be an important medium for essayists after the Stuart Restoration of 1660, when polemicists cultivated the newly emergent and rapidly expanding periodical press. New journals, whether funded by private individuals, opposition party members, or the government itself, became an important venue for partisan political thought.

Making News: Newsbook Style and Marchamont Nedham

Early modern news, in print and manuscript, was distinctly personal. The periodical form we call the newspaper emerged in England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries from a media ecology that included personalised handwritten newsletters; 'corantos' that bore news from abroad; annual almanacs with lengthy natural and judicial prognostications; weekly bills of mortality, enumerating deaths in London parishes; and pamphlets that recounted real or imagined events and participated in ongoing political, religious, and cultural debates.[4] From sensational accounts of monstrous births to reports from the fields of the Thirty Years' War; from scribal newsletters about parliamentary debates to religious tracts, essayistic writing thrived in print and manuscript fora, despite press regulations that made the

[4] J. Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641–1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); C.J. Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and S.A. Baron, 'The guises of dissemination in early seventeenth-century England: news in manuscript and print' in B. Dooley and S.A. Baron (eds.), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 41–56.

publication of domestic news a potentially libellous act.[5] Under the Star Chamber decree of 1586, such publication was illegal, and the Stationers' Company was tasked with enforcement.[6] Domestic news concerning matters of state primarily circulated in manuscript media, while printed essayistic pamphlets addressed social debates and current events that steered clear of the inner workings of government.[7]

The first weekly English newsbook, *Heads of Severall Proceedings*, began circulation on 29 November 1641 under the auspices of the Long Parliament, and, as Joad Raymond writes, 'was a sober publication, dedicated exclusively to reporting news of both Houses'.[8] Within a week, its publisher, John Thomas, found himself competing with other titles that used the same style of title page, quarto format, and internal chronological organisation.[9] England was never again without printed, periodical news for more than a few weeks, even as the format, content, and structure of its essayistic publications changed over the decades.[10] Newsbook titles proliferated despite the various regulatory mechanisms from Parliament, the Star Chamber, and the Stationers' Company attempting to control the flourishing periodical industry.[11] As Donald McKenzie's analysis of the economics of the book trade in the 1640s shows, London printers in 1644 produced more short books than hefty volumes, including essayistic newsbooks or pamphlets printed on one or two sheets, folded, and stab-stitched for circulation.[12] There was clearly a market for these publications, as Jason Peacey has

[5] F. Dahl, *A Bibliography of English Corantos and Periodical Newsbooks, 1620–1642* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1952); T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); A. Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and E. Sauer, *'Paper-Contestations' and Textual Communities in England, 1640–1675* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

[6] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 7.

[7] J. Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[8] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 20.

[9] Ibid., pp. 21–2.

[10] A. Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know About Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 219–26; Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*; and Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England*.

[11] For the definitive catalogue of these publications, see C. Nelson and M. Seccombe, *British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1641–1700: A Short-title Catalogue of Serials Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, and British America: With a Checklist of Serials Printed 1701–March 1702 and Chronological, Geographical, Foreign Language, Subject, Publishers, and Editor Indexes, 1641–1702* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1987).

[12] D.F. McKenzie, 'The London book trade in 1644' in P.D. McDonald and M.F. Suarez (eds.), *Making Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), p. 130.

argued, since publishers otherwise would have had no financial incentive to continue printing them.[13]

In August 1643, Marchamont Nedham entered the news business. An innovative essayist and mercurial polemicist, he captured the attention of his contemporaries as the lead author of the weekly parliamentarian newsbook, *Mercurius Britanicus*. His witty style was well suited to counterbalance and critique the Royalist *Mercurius Aulicus* in what became an ongoing public debate. The arc of his career reveals the opportunities and challenges of polemical writing in the periodical genres of mid-seventeenth-century England.[14] His *Mercurius Britanicus* was produced under unique conditions. It was supported by Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, Lord General of the Parliamentary Army, who served as the licensor for parts of the periodical's run, and although it was not an official mouthpiece of Parliament it was clearly aligned with the parliamentary agenda of Westminster.[15] Indeed, *Mercurius Britanicus* may have been intended to respond to *Mercurius Aulicus*, and it noted on its title page that its goal in 'Communicating the affairs of Great Britain' was, in this case, 'the better information of the people'.[16]

After sharing the authorial and editorial responsibilities of *Mercurius Britanicus* with Thomas Audley for about two years, Nedham took the reins of the paper in October 1644. In his second issue as lead writer, his distinct and provocative flair for news writing was on full display. 'Poor *Britanicus*!' he wrote, addressing at once the nation, his paper, and his own periodical persona: 'I perceive thine enemies are very angry to see thee abroad again: Nay (I hear) that some, who would be thought thy friends, dare open their mouths to malign thee: be they friends, or no friends, I care not; yet I am

[13] J. Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[14] B. Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); J. Peacey, 'The struggle for Mercurius Britanicus: factional politics and the parliamentarian press, 1643–1646', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68:3 (2005), 517–43; J. Raymond, 'Nedham Marchamont (bap. 1620, d. 1678), journalist and pamphleteer' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), *s.v.*; and B. Worden, '"Wit in a Roundhead": the dilemma of Marchamont Nedham' in S.D. Amussen and M.A. Kishlansky (eds.), *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 307.

[15] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 31; Peacey, 'The struggle for Mercurius Britanicus', 519.

[16] M. Nedham, *Mercurius Britanicus*, 53 (7–14 October 1644), sig. H1r. We have modernised spelling, capitalisation, and typography (such as italicisation) when quoting from Nedham's newsbooks in this chapter.

confident they are not.'[17] After this initial complaint about his paper's detractors, he launches into an array of rhetorical questions about the tension between *Mercurius Britanicus* and its critics. 'Is this a time to strain courtesy with those that would cut our throats?' he asks, and his answer is an emphatic no, as he points to the materiality of his own printed pages: 'Were there any hope of accommodation, or the least proffer of but one hopeful treaty, I would lay out all my ink to woo the people on both sides to a general acclamation of peace; but I despair of this so great happiness: our adversaries are both intractable, and implacable.'[18] Nedham would use his ink (the ink of his pen, the printers' ink of his newsbook) to argue for peace if his opponents could be persuaded by reason, but as they are not, he announces that he will proceed as usual, dissecting recent items from *Mercurius Aulicus* before reporting other intelligence from Westminster and elsewhere in the realm. Nedham's playful and pugilistic style in these opening essays contributed to the newsbook's vendibility and popularity.

Following the 1645 parliamentarian victory at the Battle of Naseby, Nedham's increasingly outraged outbursts pushed the form of the opening editorial essay to extremes by writing it as a 'hue and cry' seeking King Charles I. After the battle, the royal correspondence was seized by the New Model Army and carefully read by Nedham, among many others, who published it for the reading public to peruse. As Peacey explains, 'Nedham's paper appears to have been used ... to tease out the radical implications of the king's letters, which their official editors did not dare do.'[19] Nedham opens the ninety-second issue of *Mercurius Britanicus* (4 August 1645) with a provocation: 'Where is King Charles? What's become of him?' He then follows with a mocking 'hue and cry', which appropriates the common law process wherein a witness to a crime calls upon bystanders for help in apprehending a criminal:

> If any man can bring any tale or tiding of a wilful King, which hath gone astray these four years from his Parliament, with a guilty conscience, bloody hands, a heart full of broken vows and protestations: If these marks be not sufficient, there is another in the mouth; for bid him speak, and you will soon know him: Then give notice to Britanicus, and you shall be well paid for your pains: So God save the Parliament.[20]

[17] Ibid. [18] Ibid. [19] Peacey, 'The struggle for Mercurius Britanicus', 535.
[20] Nedham, *Mercurius Britanicus*, 92 (28 July–4 August 1645), sig. A1r.

This remarkable text positions Nedham, and his persona of Britanicus, as parliamentary agents and potentially captors of the King. The issue proceeds with printed excerpts from the letters of Charles I and lengthy commentary by Nedham in the style of an animadversion pamphlet, a type of printed debate that includes substantial quotations from another text followed by response, refutation, and critical glossing. The same issue of *Mercurius Britanicus* concludes by reframing the central concern of the newsbook as a rhetorical question: 'Whether the King have given over the Protection of his People?'[21]

Nedham's criticism of Charles I in *Mercurius Britanicus* did not go unnoticed. Raymond's account of the aftermath of the ninety-second issue demonstrates how its printers, licensers, and authors were all subject to prosecution for the polemic it contained. The House of Lords gathered all parties involved in the creation and production of the offending newsbook, including Thomas Audley, the licenser, and Robert White, the printer, and Nedham's punishment included putting his pen to work in the service of reconciliation, which resulted in the pamphlet *Mercurius Britanicus, His Apology to All Well-Affected People* (1645). As Raymond recounts:

> The Lords had their attention drawn to this *ad hominem* attack, and decided that the passage was 'scandalous to the kings person.' White, the printer, was sent for; he blamed Audley, the licenser; and Audley named Nedham as the author. Audley spent about nine days in prison and was forbidden to license thereafter, which injunction he soon ignored; White was imprisoned for an unknown but probably short period; and Nedham after a short incarceration was released, having written, apparently under orders, a public apology.[22]

During the months that followed, Nedham continued to clash with his erstwhile supporters. In May 1646, *Mercurius Britanicus* was silenced and Nedham and Audley were sent to the Fleet Prison on the order of the Lords after the release of issue no. 130 on 16 May. As Nedham was charged with reporting private conversations between the two Houses of Parliament, Peacey argues that the Earl of Essex was behind the suppression of the periodical.[23] The licenser, Audley, was quickly released, because issue no. 130 had not been submitted for licensing, and Nedham was thus held responsible for reporting confidential government business and, potentially, for the seditious content of the previous issue. In *Mercurius Britanicus* no. 129,

[21] Ibid., sig. B1v. [22] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 43.
[23] Peacey, 'The struggle for Mercurius Britanicus', 540–2.

printed twelve days earlier, Nedham had suggested that the Scots might 'dispose of' the King, treasonously calling for the deposition or even death of Charles I.[24]

After two weeks of incarceration and a payment of £200 in bail, Nedham promised to retire from pamphleteering, though he did not remain silent for long.[25] Turning away from the parliamentarian cause, he ingratiated himself to Charles I at Hampton Court Palace in 1647 and began writing a weekly Royalist newsbook, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, in September of that year. *Pragmaticus*, like many other Royalist publications, was unlicensed, illegal, and illicitly published, despite having the implicit approval of the King.[26] As the lead voice of *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, Nedham wielded his pen in service of the King's cause with the same vitriol and vigour that he had previously used to eviscerate his court.

One instance in which the power of Nedham's reputation combined with the affordances of the essay genre is the case of the play pamphlet *The Levellers Levell'd; or, the Independents Conspiracie to root out Monarchie: An Interlude* (1647).[27] Play pamphlets were brief topical plays that blended the conventions of stage drama with the print mode of news writing to comment on current events.[28] They were penned by the same 'poet-journalists', to use Marcus Nevitt's coinage, who were publishing essayistic writing in pamphlets and periodicals.[29] *The Levellers Levell'd* was published with the name 'Mercurius Pragmaticus' on the title page as author. The same page included (like all issues of the periodical) a witty ballad and the Latin motto of the House of Stuart, 'Nemo me impune lacessit' (No one harasses me with impunity), which Nedham used to denote not only his political allegiance but also his own pugnacious rhetorical disposition.[30]

In a subsequent issue of *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, Nedham vehemently protests that the play pamphlet was not his work: 'Another fellow sets my name to a dirty thing entitled the *Levellers Levell'd* on purpose to make his

[24] Ibid., 540; Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 47–8.
[25] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 48.
[26] Ibid., pp. 53–6.
[27] M. Nedham, *The Levellers Levell'd; or, the Independents Conspiracie to root out Monarchie. An Interlude: Written by Mercurius Pragmaticus* (London, 1647), sig. A1r.
[28] R. Willie, *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647–72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); and M. Nicosia, 'Wasting time in *The Committee-Man Curried*', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 10:1 (2019), 68–81.
[29] M. Nevitt, 'Sing heavenly news: journalism and poetic authority in Samuel Sheppard's *The Faerie King* (c. 1654)', *Studies in Philology*, 109:4 (2012), 498.
[30] Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 203; J. Peacey, '"The counterfeit silly curr": money, politics, and the forging of royalist newspapers during the English Civil War', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 67:1 (2004), 41–2.

trash vendible, and feed himself upon another man's reputation: But if I have any more of this doings, out come their names, and so I shall deliver them into the hands of the tormentors at Westminster.'[31] Nedham's 'reputation' was linked to his personal essayistic style – and inextricable from the commercial success of his publications. The upstart poet-journalist who penned that 'dirty thing' to critique the radical 'Leveller' movement that was growing in prominence in the New Model Army, was, in Nedham's eyes, trading on his established reputation to sell 'trash'.[32] Nedham might have been especially incensed that 'Pragmaticus' was also a character in *The Levellers Levell'd* who delivers his speeches in the role of a chorus to frame and endorse the play pamphlet's central action. Nedham's irate disavowal of it showcases the authorising power of newsbook imprints and authorial reputation in the marketplace of ideas. Even though the play pamphlet itself was Royalist, Nedham took to the pages of *Mercurius Pragmaticus* to protect his personal essayistic style from imitators.[33]

Nedham's career did not end with the execution of Charles I or the cessation of *Mercurius Pragmaticus*. When the Royalist cause splintered in 1649, Nedham was temporarily imprisoned and penned tracts signalling his about-face to republican thinking. In 1650 he was employed by the Council of State to write a new official and licensed weekly newsbook, *Mercurius Politicus*, which circulated throughout the Commonwealth and Protectorate eras.[34] Although Nedham's shifts in allegiance have often baffled scholars, he, like many of his fellow citizens, espoused a complex set of views. His career shifts closely followed those of politics and the marketplace. With the Restoration, Nedham went into hiding and began publishing pamphlets in support of King Charles II. In 1661 he gathered verses from the title-page ballads of *Mercurius Pragmaticus* into a new historical poem, *A Short History of the English Rebellion*, thereby transforming news into poetic history.[35] Ultimately, for Nedham, the newsbook editorial essay afforded seemingly limitless rhetorical possibilities that could be easily adapted as his political affiliations changed and as regulatory contexts and regimes shifted around him.

[31] M. Nedham, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 12 (30 November–7 December 1647); sig. M1v; Raymond, *Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 203.
[32] M. Nicosia, *Imagining Time in the English Chronicle Play: Historical Futures, 1590–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), ch. 4.
[33] Peacey, 'The counterfeit silly curr', 28.
[34] Raymond, 'Nedham Marchamont (bap. 1620, d. 1678), journalist and pamphleteer'.
[35] M. Nedham, *A Short History of the English Rebellion Compiled in Verse* (London, 1661), sig. A1r.

The Press Licensing Act and the News

In the later seventeenth century, all works intended for print were regulated through the 1662 Press Licensing Act.[36] This act limited London to twenty master printers and four founders of type. It also mandated the registration of titles with the Stationers' Company and the pre-publication submission of manuscripts to the government for licensing.[37] Both essayists and pamphleteers laboured under the censorial requirements of the licensing era, and both developed evasions. Underground illicit presses quickly emerged, and as many as half of all printed works from this period were published without an official licence.[38] Manuscript news sheets also remained an important venue for essayistic information sharing, political commentary, and polemical agitation. Letters from abroad became an important 'bridge genre' in the later seventeenth century for the circulation of news and commentary, whether in manuscript or print, and as Rachael Scarborough King has shown, such 'early newspapers were essentially series of epistles'.[39]

During the licensing period, the government worked to control the spread of news and worried that essayists and polemicists might foment dissent using illicit periodical forms.[40] Thanks to the Press Licensing Act, there was only one official newspaper, *The London Gazette*, and a few newsletters. Readers, who possessed 'a nearly pathological interest in reading and hearing news', simply had few licensed print venues for information and opinion.[41] But such restrictions led to additional regulatory problems. As the Surveyor of the Press, Sir Roger L'Estrange, complained, 'libels ... in manuscript'

[36] 'An Act for preventing the frequent Abuses in printing seditious treasonable and unlicensed Bookes and Pamphlets and for regulating of Printing and Printing Presses', 1662, reprinted in J. Raithby (ed.), *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. 5: *1628–80* (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1819), pp. 428–35.

[37] F.S. Siebert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476–1776: The Rise and Decline of Government Control* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), pp. 237ff.; and M. Dzelzainis, 'Managing the later Stuart press, 1662–1696' in L. Hutson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 529–47.

[38] McKenzie, 'The London book trade in 1644' and 'The London book trade in 1668', both in McDonald and Suarez (eds.), *Making Meaning*, pp. 126–43 and pp. 109–25, respectively. For a re-evaluation of those statistics, see J. Raymond, 'Censorship in law and practice in seventeenth-century England: Milton's *Areopagitica*' in Hutson (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature*, pp. 509–10.

[39] R.S. King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), pp. 26, 23. For more on the epistle in relation to the essay, see E.T. Bannet's 'Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays' in this volume (Ch. 8).

[40] J. Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 3.

[41] J. Raymond, 'The newspaper, public opinion, and the public sphere in the seventeenth century', *Prose Studies*, 21:2 (1998), 109.

were often even 'more seditious and scandalous' than those printed.[42] The act was renewed by successive parliaments and lapsed twice, first between 1679 and 1685 and then permanently in 1695. Both periods of lapsed regulation witnessed similar outpourings of pamphlets and periodicals. The first lapse followed the Popish Plot of 1678, when politicians were supposedly scheming to replace Charles II with his Catholic brother James, plunging England into a particularly fraught and paranoid period. Unlicensed essayistic works immediately proliferated (more newspapers were printed in 1679, for instance, than at any time since 1649), offering a heady mix of domestic news and political commentary.[43]

In 1685, Parliament reinstated licensing, but the legislation proved short-lived. Ten years later, licensing lapsed once again, when the House of Lords declined to renew the Press Licensing Act. They called it 'a law which in no [ways] answered the end for which it was made'.[44] Instead, the act had been troublingly instrumentalised during the growing party politics of the period as a tool for silencing the opposition. The House of Commons believed that this lapse was only temporary, and between 1695 and 1714 repeatedly attempted to re-enact licensing.[45] To fill the regulatory void, Parliament turned to the courts, pursuing post-publication prosecutions through a variety of libel offences.[46] With the end of pre-publication licensing, England quickly entered what Dror Wahrman has called a 'new media regime', one that entailed 'the circulation of much more information much faster and farther than ever before', particularly in pamphlet and periodical formats.[47] New periodical titles routinely appeared and their frequency increased, so much so that by 1719 the *St James's Weekly Journal* was able

[42] R. L'Estrange, 'The minutes of a project for the preventing of libells', State Papers 29/51/10, The National Archives, UK.

[43] R.B. Walker, 'The newspaper press in the reign of William III', *Historical Journal*, 17:4 (1974), 692.

[44] 'Commons' reasons for not renewing the Licensing Act, 1695' in E.N. Williams (ed.), *The Eighteenth-Century Constitution, 1688–1815: Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 399–401; and R. Astbury, 'The renewal of the Licensing Act in 1693 and its lapse in 1695', *The Library*, 33 (1978), 296–322.

[45] L. Hanson, *Government and the Press, 1695–1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 260–3.

[46] P. Hamburger, 'The development of the law of seditious libel and the control of the press', *Stanford Law Review*, 37:3 (1985), 661–765; T. Keymer, *Poetics of the Pillory: English Literature and Seditious Libel, 1660–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 92–5; and A.B. Bricker, *Libel and Lampoon: Satire in the Courts, 1670–1792* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 248–69.

[47] D. Wahrman, *Mr Collier's Letter Racks: A Tale of Art and Illusion at the Threshold of the Modern Information Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 20.

to bemoan, with kettle-and-pot irony, that 'city, town and country, are overflowed every day with an inundation of newspapers'.[48]

Fact, Fiction, and the Flood of Periodicals

Information gathering and news distribution were important functions of early periodicals, but commentary, interpretation, and analysis remained distinguishing characteristics of the essayistic writing featured in these serial publications. Those essayistic elements often took on explicitly political leanings. Journalists were expected to produce highly sectarian and even propagandistic readings of both domestic and international affairs. As Michael Harris has written, the 'post-1695 London papers were engulfed by the publications generated by party conflict', creating a rich discursive world of argument and counterargument.[49] As a result, many journals were born during specific political controversies or were funded by political parties. This was the 'age of party', when intense sectarianism and frequent elections encouraged and fuelled the politicisation of periodicals and pamphlets alike.[50] Government after government in the first decades of the eighteenth century spent staggering sums not only to prosecute opposition members of the press, but also to fund periodicals and pamphlets teeming with party propaganda.[51]

During this era, too, the essayistic form, even in its most political manifestations, remained a vibrant, malleable, and creative medium. Essayists for opposition journals often wrote in playfully evasive modes, especially between the 1710s and 1730s. Take, for instance, Richard Francklin's *The Craftsman*, a Tory-funded periodical that actively opposed Sir Robert Walpole's administration in thinly veiled allegorical essays, often based on

[48] Anon., 'Introduction', *St James's Weekly Journal: Or, Hanover Post-Man*, no. 1 (31 October 1719), 1.

[49] M. Harris, 'London newspapers' in M.F. Suarez and M.L. Turner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. 5: *1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 417.

[50] J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 129–58; T. Harris, *Politics under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society, 1660–1715* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 188; and D. Gigante, 'Pedantry and party politics: essays in the public sphere' in E. Sauer (ed.), *Emergent Nation: Early Modern British Literature in Transition, 1660–1714*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 19–34.

[51] J.A. Downie, *Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and M. Harris, 'Print and politics in the age of Walpole' in J. Black (ed.), *Britain in the Age of Walpole* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), pp. 189–210.

fake news from abroad and the genre of 'parallel history' (the implicit application of historical events to the political present). Walpole appeared in almost every issue of the journal, often under 'feigned names', literary stand-ins, and historical and contemporaneous parallels – from Volpone, Ben Jonson's dramatic character embodying lust and greed, to Lucius Aelius Sejanus, the power-hungry confidant of the Roman emperor Tiberius; from Aleksander Danilovich Menshikov, the corrupt advisor to Peter the Great and de facto ruler of Russia under Empress Catherine, to the highwaymen Joseph 'Blueskin' Blake and Jonathan Wild.[52] Unsurprisingly, *The Craftsman* was subject to routine government inquiries throughout the period it was in print, and its printer-publisher Francklin was arrested eight times in the four years between 1727 and 1731.[53]

Mist's Weekly Journal, the most important and popular political periodical of the late 1710s and 1720s, proved equally crafty. One essay, from 1728, rewrote the anti-Stuart 'warming-pan' myth in explicitly Jacobite terms. In 1688, the story went, James Francis Edward Stuart – the son of the current king, James II, and his wife, Mary Beatrice of Modena – was smuggled into the queen's bedchamber in a warming pan to replace her stillborn child and thus settle on England a Catholic male heir.[54] The story was a staple of paranoid English fantasies, a feature of a British anti-Catholicism that was openly espoused in the service of a Protestant national identity and formalised at law.[55] In 1728, *Mist's Weekly Journal* brazenly recast the myth as a Jacobite allegory of the Hanoverian monarchy and the Walpole government. Today known as the 'Persian Letter', the epistle in the journal claimed that 'Persia' (England) had long been governed by the 'old Usurper *Meryweis*' (the German-born King George I), before being handed over to the bumbling misgovernance of '*Esreff*, the present Usurper' (King George II). Among the

[52] S. Varey, 'The growth of capitalism and the rise of the press in the age of Walpole' in G.J. Schochet (ed.), *Politics, Politeness and Patriotism* (Washington: Folger Institute, 1993), pp. 267–8.

[53] R. Lund, '"An alembick of innuendos": satire, libel, and *The Craftsman*', *Philological Quarterly*, 95:2 (2016), 243–68; J.J. Caudle, 'Richard Francklin: a controversial publisher, bookseller and printer, 1718–1765' in Suarez and Turner (eds.), *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 5, pp. 383–96.

[54] M.T. Symonds, 'Grub Street culture: the newspapers of Nathaniel Mist, 1716–1737', unpublished PhD thesis, University College London (2007), 252; R.J. Weil, 'The politics of legitimacy: women and the warming-pan scandal' in L.G. Schwoerer (ed.), *The Revolution of 1688–89: Changing Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 65–82; M. McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 549–57.

[55] L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 19–25.

letter writer's many outrageous claims was the preposterous insinuation that George II was a changeling.[56] Suddenly, after decades of anti-Jacobite and anti-Catholic rumour-mongering, the warming-pan myth was turned on its head: the Hanoverian king, George II, rather than the Stuart pretender, was an illegitimate bastard foisted on George I.

For essayists of the early eighteenth century, the periodical press proved a welcome if contentious home for their most provoking polemics, pieces that often bridged the fictional and factual, sometimes in equal measure. Because pamphlets and periodicals at the time could only be regulated by the courts through post-publication prosecutions, essayists were able to experiment with the political and rhetorical possibilities of propaganda.[57] The essay thus remained a flexible form during this later period, a site not only for the distribution of information, but also for its interpretation by writers of every political stripe.

It was these affordances, to return to a term with which we began this chapter, that the essay provided. As Caroline Levine has written, 'all forms . . . share one affordance. Precisely because they are abstract organising principles, shapes and patterns are iterable – portable.'[58] It is in this regard that we might think about the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century essay as a 'fugitive form', a mobile and at times illicit venue that could occupy a variety of media and that could be bent to the needs of individual writers. The essay presumed no set authorial style, no particular politics, no established medium. Instead, it stood in wait, both malleable and portable, a ready-made medium for an author's occasional or topical needs, a fleeting form that could jump from newsbooks and pamphlets to early newspapers and journals, finding new allegiances and readers along the way.

[56] Amos Dudge (pseud.), '[Persian Letter]', *Mist's Weekly Journal*, no. 175 (24 August 1728), [1].
[57] A.B. Bricker, 'The visual and the verbal: the intermediality of English satire, c. 1695–1750' in C. Rosengren, P. Sivefors, and R. Wingård (eds.), *Changing Satire: Transformations and Continuities in Europe, 1600–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), pp. 231–61. For a later instantiation of rhetorical experimentation in the propagandist essay, see R. Baldacchino's discussion in Ch. 35 of this volume ('The essay in the age of catastrophe').
[58] Levine, *Forms*, p. 7.

8

Between Public and Private: Letters, Diaries, Essays

EVE TAVOR BANNET

The question of relations between essays, letters, and diaries was first raised by Michel de Montaigne, who (as others in this volume note) was also the first to use the term 'essay' for volumes composed of short discourses on miscellaneous abstract or general themes: 'Of Idleness'; 'Of Liars'; 'Of Ready or Slow Speech'. Montaigne repeatedly insists in his prefatory epistolary address ('The Author to the Reader') that in his *Essayes* 'it is my self I portray ... my self am the groundwork of my book'. Indeed, he claimed to need the essay, a new genre without extant rules of art, precisely because his 'familiar and private *end*' was 'to be delineated in mine own genuine, simple and ordinary fashion, without contention, art or study', so that his 'kinsfolk and friends' might remember him hereafter as they had known him in life.[1]

But how were miscellaneous discourses on general topics supposed to portray Montaigne's 'self' in a manner that *his* intimates would recognise? This puzzled twentieth-century critics who remained mired in nineteenth-century binary oppositions and assumed that, in contradistinction to the published essay, the letter and diary were and had always been private, self-expressive, autobiographical genres.[2] In fact, from Montaigne to the early nineteenth century, these three genres were far more alike and far more closely aligned than they later became. Forms we expect to be private (diaries, letters) were largely public performances, while published essays were performed as possibly transitory, private thoughts and feelings. As this chapter proposes to show, understanding the essay during its first several centuries benefits greatly from recourse to these other genres.

[1] M. Montaigne, 'The author to the reader' in *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. J. Florio (London: E. Blount, 1603), n.p., spelling of this edition modernised for clarity.

[2] Most successfully in C. Brush, *From the Perspective of the Self: Montaigne's Self-Portrait* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994).

Essays and Letters

Montaigne's prefatory letter explains the relationship between the essay and the letter for his own time, and for the next two centuries or more. Especially in John Florio's sensitive and influential translation of 1603, it showed genteel seventeenth-century English readers how his essays at once resemble the familiar letter as they knew it, and escape 'the tyrannie of custome' as displayed, for instance, in Angel Day's *The English Secretorie* (1586), which rigorously laid out the forms common to all letters and dictated the commonplaces proper to each 'sorte'.[3] Eliminating the letter's prescribed 'orders of Greetings, Farewells, Subscriptions ... Superscriptions and Directions', Montaigne's essays went directly to what he had to say upon a given subject, while preserving the familiar letter's characteristic brevity; its informal, rambling, conversational style; and its character as an address directed primarily to kinsfolk or friends.[4] He departed from the miscellaneous character of the familiar letter, which could range over a variety of subjects, by making each essay 'Of' the single topic announced in its title and by re-examining, rather than repeating, the conventional commonplaces attached to it. But he preserved the letter's fragmentary, unfinished, and provisional nature – each piece was, after all, only an essay, an attempt to tackle some aspect of a topic that was tentative and open to further essays.

It was a Renaissance cliché that letters were only 'written conversation', the silent or written version of what one would say if one were talking to someone in person.[5] Less directly, perhaps, essays were too. Like letters, essays were often answered, and not just by readers in conversation, marginalia, or commonplace books. Seventeenth-century English luminaries such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626), William Cornwallis (1579–1614), Robert Burton (1577–1640), and William Temple (1555–1627) conversed with each other across volumes of published essays from the first.[6] Bacon, for instance,

[3] For the impact of Florio's translation and differences between this and Charles Cotton's plain, post-Royal Society translation, see L. Westling, 'Montaigne in English dress from Florio to Cotton', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 13 (October 1978), 117–24; and W.M. Hamlin, 'Florio's Montaigne and the tyranny of "custome": appropriation, ideology and early English readership of the *Essayes*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 63:2 (Summer 2010), 491–544.

[4] A. Day, *The English Secretorie* (London: R. Jones, 1586), table of contents. For kinds of letters, see E.T. Bannet, *Empire of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 2.

[5] J. Goldberg, *Writing Matter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[6] F. Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, newly enlarged (London: H. Barret, 1625); W. Cornwallis, *Essayes by Sir William Cornewallys, the yonger, Knight* (London: E. Mattes, 1606); R. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, what It Is. With all the Kindes, Cavses, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Seuerall Cvres of It* (Oxford: H. Cripps, 1621); and Sir William Temple, *Miscellanae: The Second Part in Four Essays* (London: R. & R. Simpson, 1690).

answered Montaigne's essay 'Of Liars', which attributes his own failures to keep his word to his faulty memory, with an essay 'Of Truth', which pointed out that 'it is not the lie that passeth through the mind but the lie that sinketh in, and settleth in it, that doth hurt' and warned that there is 'a natural, though corrupt, love of the lie itself'.[7] The ubiquity of such conversations led Sir Thomas Culpeper (1625/6–97) to complain as early as 1655 that essayists were constantly revisiting the same 'very popular' themes until 'the path was so trodden with throngs of Authors' that there was 'nothing new' to be said ('Of Fame', 'Of History', 'Of Education', 'Of Truth', 'Of Lies', and so forth).[8] Constant reprinting of Montaigne's and Bacon's essays throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries also fostered recurrence of many of the same practical, moral, and civil topics in ongoing essay-borne conversations into the nineteenth century. But as more and more dogmatists re-trod the well-trodden paths to repeat the safe and conventional truths of their time, other essayists tended to use allusions to Montaigne or Bacon to signal their participation in the original, more sceptical, tradition of questioning received ideas and judging for oneself that was associated with these two seminal authors, albeit in different ways.

As Montaigne's prefatory letter points out, essays resembled familiar letters in being personal but not private.[9] Normatively read aloud to family and friends, and often copied and passed on, letters prior to the nineteenth century easily migrated beyond their addressee through oral delivery, gossip, and scribal transcription, increasingly finding their way into print. A letter writer at the time would compose a letter in the knowledge that unless she took extraordinary measures (encryption, secret writing, clandestine delivery), its addressee would probably not be its only reader, and hence whatever sentiments it expressed were likely to become public. Montaigne likewise observed that his essays were written for kin and friends directly concerned with his 'self' in the knowledge that this meant that they were also being published to the world – absurd though it was for the world to concern itself with such 'frivolous and vain' matter as his 'self'.[10]

[7] Bacon, *Essayes or Counsels*, pp. 1–2.

[8] T. Culpeper, *Morall Discourses and Essayes upon Severall Select Subjects, written by T.C. Esquire* (London: C. Adams, 1655), sig. A4r.

[9] For the distinction between personal and private, see C. Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 15.

[10] The primary meaning of private was still 'secret'; Montaigne uses the word in this sense in describing his 'end'.

Almost a century later, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), where he had likewise made his self the groundwork of his book, John Locke used his own prefatory 'Epistle to the Reader' to highlight further analogies between essays and letters. Locke stressed his *Essay*'s fragmentary and provisional character, and explained that his book had originated in a piecemeal 'discontinued way of writing'. Resembling a series of letters, it had been written for a few friends 'by catches', in 'incoherent parcels', with 'many long intervals of interruption', and 'continued at their entreaty' each time. The pieces had then been collected and patched together, despite resulting repetitions and omissions, to form a treatise-length essay composed of epistolary essays. Just as letters serve as 'written conversation' by inviting or anticipating a response, Locke's *Essay* invites its readers to participate in his search for truth as his friends had earlier done, by 'mak[ing] use of thy own thoughts in reading' and 'judg[ing] for thyself', rather than taking anything 'on trust' in order to correct any errors and supply any lacks.[11] Locke's actual coterie of friends would thus have been supplemented by readers in a sort of virtual coterie, who would continue the 'conversation' or search for truth by expressing their own thoughts and judgments in their marginalia and conversations,

Before epistolary novels would imitate the immediate social scene by putting the public in the position of family or friends listening to someone else's correspondence, essays from Montaigne to Locke took advantage of the wider de facto reach of epistolary communications by stripping letters of superscriptions, and thus of particularity of address, to direct their informal and reflective conversations to the wider public and invite their response. Each essay was a letter to the reader – a reader now invisible, anonymous, and unknown – who was nevertheless still being asked to play an active, thoughtful, and responsive role.

Essays and Diaries

Initially, diaries also bore strong family resemblances to letters and essays. A diary entry was as brief, as provisional, as miscellaneous, and as much 'to be continued' as any letter or essay. It was also as informal in style and as dialogical in conception; but the self was in the position of the listener or reader. Where a letter or essay was addressed to others, a diary or journal

[11] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 5th ed. (London: A. & J. Churchill & S. Manship, 1706), pp. xxxi–xxxiii.

entry was in the first instance addressed to oneself. Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury characterised this type of writing as 'self-converse', recording the mind in conversation with itself, while Locke spoke of the mind dividing itself in two to make itself its own object; Adam Smith suggested that such writing was like looking at oneself through the eyes of a spectator, thus positing and internalising a public to whom interiority would be presented and by whom it would be judged.[12]

This dialogical view of introspection, which is eminently applicable to diaries, made sense both because the self was still understood and defined in relation to others (one was a father, mother, master, mistress, son, daughter, servant, sibling, or friend) and because diaries, along with commonplace books and marginalia, were often designed as legacies to be left for the education, information, and counsel of descendants. John Evelyn began his diary more like a memoir addressed to his posterity than a diurnal record, with descriptions of his parents' appearance, character, and achievements, and of their seat at Wotton. Not untypically of early diaries, he used dates loosely and retrospectively to encompass several days and include a variety of past and future events: '1639 . . . 20 May. Accompany'd with one Mr Jo. Crafford (who afterwards being my fellow-traveller in Italy there changed his religion), I took a journey of pleasure to see ye Sumersetshire Bathes, Bristoll, Cirencester, Malmsbury, Abington, and divers other townes of lesser note, and returned the 25th.'[13] Peter Heehs observes that 'diaries differ from memoirs in not being retrospective . . . They are written from day to day, with the present as a moving vantage point and without any knowledge of the future'; but in early modern diaries such as Evelyn's, this was not yet the case.[14]

Mental detour through the eye of another also made sense in diaristic writing because, like the letter or the essay, the diary was not yet private in the modern sense of being normatively restricted to a single addressee and forbidden to everyone else. Samuel Pepys in the late seventeenth century was not alone in resorting to encryption to protect his diary from the curious, or in burning his wife's letters because of their 'being wrote in English, and

[12] A.A. Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols. (London: J. Darby, 1711), vol. 2, p. 113; Locke, *Essay* ('Epistle to the reader'); A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: A. Millar, 1759), pp. 187ff.

[13] J. Evelyn, *Memoirs, Illustrative of the Life and Writings of John Evelyn* [. . .] *Comprising his Diary from the Year 1641 to 1705–6 and a Selection of his Familiar Letters*, ed. W. Bray, 2nd ed. (London: H. Colburn, 1819), p. 8.

[14] P. Heehs, *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 6. Heehs also argues that there are similarities between essays and diaries.

so in danger of being met with and read by others'.[15] Nor was Frances Burney, a century later, alone in anticipating that her diaries would be read by anyone who found her notebooks, and indeed, that her elders would consider themselves entitled to do so. Anything written could also be politically dangerous: a man could be hanged or imprisoned for what was found among his private papers as well as for what he wrote in letters intercepted at the post.

Among secular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century diarists, both forms of potential publicity tended to promote lively accounts of social or familial experiences, of travel and places visited, even of essay-like reflections upon each – material that historians now find particularly useful. The possibility of public exposure tended to discourage detailed, self-indulgent confessions of the writer's innermost feelings and the inscription of judgments or of information about oneself and others that was safer kept to oneself. Sharon Seelig observes that the diaries of seventeenth-century ladies like Anne Clifford or Anne Fanshawe provide such 'useful sources of information about social conditions, attitudes and behaviors' that it is easy to overlook how 'recalcitrant' they were in their self-depictions, and how much they left 'unsaid'.[16] This recalcitrance was not restricted to women. John Evelyn was far more forthcoming about what he saw in Amsterdam than about what he discovered in London to make him conclude that it was safer to travel abroad than to stay at home after the Civil War began. In the second half of the eighteenth century, James Boswell still found it necessary to open his *London Journals* by observing that 'a plan of this kind was dangerous, as a man might in the openness of his heart say many things and discover many facts that might do him great harm if the journal should fall into the hands of ... enemies'; he therefore resolved to 'be upon my guard to mention nothing that can do harm' and to 'relate things under borrowed names with safety that would do much mischief if particularly known'.[17] Sincerity and apparent openness was a quality of style that should not mislead us. As Hugh Blair warned, those who were 'childish' enough to expect to find 'the whole heart of the author unveiled' in letters to close friends were fooling themselves, since 'concealment and disguise take place, more or less, in all human intercourse'.[18]

[15] Samuel Pepys's diary entry of 9 January 1663, cited in ibid., p. 60.
[16] C.S. Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 9.
[17] J. Boswell, *Boswell's London Journals, 1762–1763*, ed. F.A. Pottle (1950; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 39–40.
[18] H. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 3 vols. (Dublin: Whitestone, Colles, Burnet, Moncrieffe, Gilbert, et al., 1783), vol. 3, p. 88.

A form of introspective religious diary writing did come into its own in England during the Commonwealth period. Protestant sects that saw conversion as the outcome of a painful, protracted internal civil war in the soul, promoted self-examination in confessional diaries. By the 1730s, such diary-keeping had become an established devotional practice among a variety of religious groups, from nonconformists to Methodists and from Anglicans in the 'Holy Living' tradition to evangelicals.[19] But despite the daily introspection required by the writer's 'examen of conscience', this did not yet signal the triumph of privacy and subjectivity.[20]

For one thing, the terms in which the self was analysed and understood in these spiritual autobiographies were dictated by sectarian devotional manuals; for another, confessional diaries were shared with divines acting as spiritual guides, and made public orally, through scribal circulation, or in print. Confessional diaries proselytised by showing others how to attribute their suffering to sin and guilt, and how to escape it by discovering in themselves signs of election, evidence of 'inner light' and 'convincement', or salvatory movements of the Holy Spirit.[21] Diaries or extracts from them were made public to that end: 'What I design in the following Extract', wrote John Wesley, 'is Openly to declare to all Mankind, What it Is that the Methodists (so called) have done, and are doing Now: or rather, What it Is that God hath done ... All who calmly observe it, must say, This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our Eyes.'[22]

Some of this same work of proselytising was done by publishing pastoral letters, such as those between John Wesley and Ann Bolton, in which a mentee testified to their spiritual victories and defeats while their spiritual mentor offered guidance and doctrinal support in more essayistic form. According to Bruce Hindmarsh, 'the familiar letter' was privileged alongside the devotional diary as a means of 'accumulating' and disseminating 'testimony to the work of the Spirit', to the point that 'the Evangelical revival was also an epistolary revival'.[23]

[19] D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); G. Wright, 'Delight in good books: family, devotional practice, and textual circulation in Sarah Savage's diaries', *Book History*, 18 (2015), 48–74.

[20] Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 39.

[21] J. Wesley, *An Extract of the Reverend Mr John Wesley's Journal from February 1, 1737–1738 to His Return from Germany* (London: W. Strahan, 1740), p. 3.

[22] Ibid.

[23] D.B. Hindmarsh, 'Spiritual experience and early evangelical correspondence: the letters of John Wesley and Ann Bolton, 1768–1791', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 79:3 (Autumn 2016), 455–6.

Self as Another

Letters and diaries could, in principle, be filled with passionate expressions of the writer's emotions; but before British Romantic writers, the most familiar and frequently reprinted secular exemplars of passionate self-expression were translated or imitated from the French, confined to love, and largely fictional – one has only to think of the so-called *Portuguese Letters* (1678); Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Noble-Man and His Sister* (1684–7 and 1696), or *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (1713).[24] In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English women's diaries and letters, strong emotions and accounts of private feelings were positively suppressed.[25] Partly because the Civil War had left Britons with a fear of 'enthusiasm' (uncontrolled and potentially destabilising excesses of emotion), and partly because the civilising process depended on emotional concealment and self-restraint, well-bred eighteenth-century people were expected to hide their feelings and control their passions.

Essays, too, remained bound by the dominant rule of self-presentation in polite conversation and polite correspondence. Only bores droned on about themselves. The polite made their discourse entertaining as well as informative by filtering observations on some topic of general interest through their own character, attitudes, sentiments and 'voice'. Like polite letters, essays discretely personalised their observations. As Montaigne put it, they allowed readers 'therein to find some lineaments of [the author's] conditions and humours' and to 'discern' his 'natural forme' so far as 'publike reverence permitted [him]' to show it.[26] Essays by Bacon do not sound like those by Montaigne, nor (to take nineteenth-century examples), do essays by William Hazlitt sound like those by Thomas Babington Macauley.[27] Without

[24] See G.J. de Lavergne, vicomte de Guilleragues, *Five Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier, Done out of French into English by Sir Roger L'Estrange* (London: H. Brome, 1678); A. Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Noble-Man and His Sister* (London: R. Taylor, 1684); P. Abelard, *Letters of Abelard and Heloise: With a Particular Account of their Lives, Amours, and Misfortunes: Extracted Chiefly from Monsieur Bayle*, ed. John Hughes (London: J. Watts, 1713); and *Eloisa to Abelard Written by Mr Pope* (London: B. Lintot, 1720).

[25] For suppression of feeling, see for instance R. Woods, *Children Remembered: Responses to Untimely Death in the Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006); and K. Kittredge, 'A long-forgotten sorrow: the mourning journal of Melesina Trench', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 21:1 (Fall 2008), 153–77. Kittredge compares Trench to Hester Thrale and Catharine Tait, each mourning the death of children in 1776 and 1856, respectively. For modern 'protest' against such 'cultural modes of Narrativization' and 'homogenising communitarian notions', see A.L. Bose (ed.), *Writing Gender Writing Self* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[26] Montaigne, 'The author to the reader' in *The Essayes*, trans. Florio, n.p.

[27] See, e.g., W. Hazlitt, *Table-Talk; or, Original Essays* (London: J. Warren, 1821–2) and T.B. Macaulay, *Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays*, 6 vols. (New York: Sheldon, 1860).

transgressing the limits of polite and reasonable discourse, such essayists come across as people with very different intellectual physiognomies, values, and tastes.

Following *The Tatler* (1709–11) and *The Spectator* (1711–14), periodical essayists enlarged upon essayists' politely reticent delineation of a 'selfe' by creating a 'Character' – an eidolon or fictional persona, that could be inhabited by diverse writers, whose engaging lineaments would be discretely discernible in their essays.[28] Isaac D'Israeli, himself a notable essayist who was reprinted throughout the nineteenth century, explained the functions and importance of this device by referring back to Addison's Spectator:

> Why is Addison still the first of our essayists? He has sometimes been excelled in criticism more philosophical, in topics more interesting, and in diction more coloured. But there is a personal charm in the character he has assumed in his periodical Miscellanies, which is felt with such gentle force that we scarce avert to it. He has painted forth his little humours, his individual feelings, and eternised himself to his readers. We come from Addison's [essays] as from private conversation.[29]

The wholly or partly fictional presentation of the essayist as an engaging character conversing familiarly with the reader compensated for the fact that essays designed for an anonymous public could not rely, as real letters and diaries could, on prior acquaintance with their authors to make readers care about what they had to say. A character gave periodical readers something like a person to enjoy and attach themselves to, and offered them the familiar pleasures of conversing with someone with whom they could comfortably identify.

Tilottama Rajan has argued that 'auto-narration' or fictionalising as a means of distancing self-representation from the self, is to be found in Romantic writings of all kinds: the author 'enters the text . . . as a subjective process represented through a figure of the self . . . a textual articulation of the self that is already not the real self, but the self as it is produced within existing discourses'.[30] Autobiographical novels such as Mary Hays's *Memoirs*

[28] On this topic, see J.R. Wood's 'Essayistic personae and personhood' in this volume (Ch. 10).

[29] I. D'Israeli, *Miscellanies; or, Literary Recreations* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1796), p. 5. See also M.N. Powell, *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012).

[30] T. Rajan, 'Autonarration and genotext in Mary Hays' *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32:2 (Summer 1993), 159–60. See also J. Murray, 'Mary Hays and the form of life', *Studies in Romanticism*, 52:1 (Spring 2013), 61–84; E. Chiavetta, 'Angles of refraction: the letters of Mary Delany', *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 3 (2014), 199–215; and M. Sinding,

of Emma Courtney (1796), based on Hays's own letters to William Frend, or Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), which gave her own experiences as a governess a happy ending, illustrate the indirection, displacement, and fictionalising of selfhood involved. However, this was not new. Seelig has shown that seventeenth-century women already fictionalised their self-representations by borrowing conventions from romance, prophecy, or providential theology to enable each to 'present herself or her family as she wishes them to be understood'.[31]

It was only sensible to fictionalise the self as another for public consumption. For periodical writers wishful to 'improve the world', this qualified as a cleverly persuasive rhetorical move, 'the softer Affections of the Mind, being properly raised and awakened, make way for the Operation of all good Arts'.[32] A beloved periodical persona to whom readers were drawn, softened them up for any argument that character wished to advance. But fictionalising the self was also a protective move. In print culture, it was consciously deployed as a means of concealment, not only to screen the author's real self from readers or to evade Romantic charges of egotism but also, in an age of censorship and deep political divisions, to protect the author from identification by punitive government authorities.[33] At a time when a virtuous woman was not supposed to have a 'history', female writers had a further reason for rewriting the self as a fictionalised other since her too frank confession or too open self-display were so often productive of public derision and contempt.[34]

The essay might thus be described as an open letter that offered the reading public a personal, provisional, and thoughtful take on some aspect of a topic of general and usually practical interest. Its autobiographical element lay principally in its thoughtful, personal, and potentially eccentric or sceptical perspective. Any underlying living experience could be mentioned in passing or not. The important thing was that the essay's argument and style, together with its selection and treatment of citations extracted

'From fact to fiction: the question of genre in autobiography and early first-person novels', *SubStance*, 39:2 (2010), 107–30.

[31] Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender*, pp. 156–7.

[32] R. Steele, *The Lover*, no. 1 (25 February 1714), 8.

[33] On egotism, see J. Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783–1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 3.

[34] L.M. Thompson, *The 'Scandalous Memoirists': Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the Shame of 'Publick Fame'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and G.L. Walker, 'Mary Hays's love letters', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 51 (2002), 94–115. Before their death, letter writers or their families were wont to selectively burn or, like Mercy Otis Warren, rewrite for posterity, any letters that seemed too honest or too passionate, or that might prove embarrassing if circulated.

from the author's commonplace book, bore witness to the breadth, quality, and style of a singular person's reading and to the singularity, subtlety, humours, and orientation of their mind.[35]

During the eighteenth century, secular discourse of the self shifted from Shaftesbury's terms of self-love, self-interest, self-concernment and self-good. In eighteenth-century periodicals, miscellanies, and essay collections, the essayist's singular intellectual profile manifested itself in demonstrations of sensibility, taste, and knowledge. But essays still generally adhered to impersonal norms and there were new impersonal topics, such as supposedly impartial biographical and critical essays on great men or women and discourses on human nature.[36] Isaac D'Israeli explained that the miscellaneous essays he called *Curiosities of Literature* (1791) were designed to 'direct taste' and 'to illustrate a series of observations on human life', 'to familiarise the mind with "the Study of Man"', and to 'make us . . . *think*'.[37] He was repeating for the unlearned what Montaigne and other essayists had always held: that the purpose of essaying personal and possibly eccentric views on general subjects was to invite others to reflect and respond.

Embedded Essays

Because one of the several functions both of letters and of diaries was, as Boswell said, to record 'thoughts on different subjects at different times', it is in these forms that one finds something approaching the modern autobiographical essay, where reflections about some aspect of life or pronouncements of practical wisdom are attached to or derived from the particular experiences, ambitions, feelings, or characteristics of an individual. Here, for instance, is part of Boswell's journal entry for 1 December 1762:

> I was now upon a plan of studying polite reserved behaviour, which is the only way to keep up dignity of character. . . . After my wild expedition to London in the year 1760 . . . I became dissipated and thoughtless. When my father forced me down to Scotland, I was at first very low-spirited, although to appearance very high. I afterwards from my native vivacity endeavoured

[35] For more on this topic, see A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3).

[36] See E.T. Bannet, '"Modern biography": form, function, and celebrity in eighteenth-century genre theory', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 45:2 (April 2021), 24–55.

[37] I. D'Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature: Consisting of Anecdotes, Characters, Sketches, and Observations, Literary, Critical, and historical*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (London: Murray & Highley, 1798), vol. 1, pp. vi–vii.

> to make myself easy; and like a man who takes to drink to banish care, I threw myself loose as a heedless, dissipated, rattling fellow who might say or do every ridiculous thing. This made me sought after by everybody in the present hour, but I found myself a very inferior being, and I found many people presuming to treat me as such, which notwithstanding of my appearance of undiscerning gaiety, gave me much pain. I was in short, a character very different from what God intended me and I myself chose. I remember my friend Johnston told me one day after my return from London that I had turned out different from what he imagined, as he thought I would resemble Mr Addison. I laughed and threw out some deep sally of humour, but the observation struck deep . . . When my father at last put me into an independent situation, I felt my mind regain its natural dignity. I hoped by degrees to attain some degree of propriety. Mr Addison's character in sentiment, mixed with a little of the gaiety of Sir Richard Steele, and the manners of Mr Digges were the ideas which I aimed to realise.[38]

The particular experiences here recounted are the arrival in London of the 'hamely' and over-familiar Fiffe family from Scotland, and Boswell's memory of the time in his Scottish past when he still behaved as they do. Reflecting on these experiences, he constructs a discursive binary, in which familiarity is associated with dependence, indignity, clownishness, and provincial popularity; and politeness with independence, reserve, dignity, and urbanity. Blaming his father, his native Scotland, and his own despair for conduct he had come to regard as contemptible, he argues that close 'study' and imitation of distinguished London models of politeness were as necessary as financial independence to enable a man to create for himself the respectable character of a London gentleman and man about town. Here in his journal, therefore, Boswell makes a self-contained, essay-like argument about the best means of self-transformation from provincial booby to London habitué, using his personal experience as grounds both for reflection and for developing a 'plan of studying polite reserved behaviour'. The section describing his argument, his autobiographical experience, and his plan for self-improvement can easily be extracted from the diary as a stand-alone essay.

If essays were embedded in diaries and journals, they were even more frequently embedded in letters, especially during the eighteenth century, when letters were the preferred platform for conveying all kinds of written and printed material: philosophical treatises, conduct books, histories, scientific and diplomatic reports, foreign news, travel accounts, religious

[38] Boswell, *London Journals*, p. 39. John Johnston was a Scottish school friend who remained close to Boswell in later life.

disquisitions, and more. Titles such as the following tell readers that there are essays embedded in the letters: *A Character of England. As it was lately presented in a Letter to a Nobleman of France* (1659) by John Evelyn; *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour. In a Letter to a Friend* (1709) by Shaftesbury; *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex. In a Letter to a Friend* (1721) by 'A Lady'; *An Essay on Logarithms . . . In a Letter to John Gray Esq, Rector of Marischall College* (1767) by Andrew Reid; *A Philosophical Essay on the Moral and Political State of Ireland. In a Letter to Earl Fitzwilliam* (1797) by William Drennan; and *A Popular Essay on Subjects of Penal Law . . . In a Letter to John Bacon* (1838) by Francis Lieber.

Some have argued that this period was unable to distinguish between a letter and an essay.[39] But the doubling of genres in these titles suggests, instead, that readers were being alerted not to expect the usual miscellaneous letter 'From a Gentleman in Town to his Friend in the Country', but only that part of the letter which constituted an essay 'on' or 'of' the subject named. While the immediate addressee was specified in the embedding letter, the printed essay embraced the wider public. Like the earliest essays, this promoted an ongoing exchange of views in print between the author and their addressee in a series of printed, letter-wrapped essays. By incorporating a double addressee and double invitation to respond, it also invited 'conversation' between readers and the text, and between readers and their friends, about what had been essayed.

Markedly autobiographical essays, consisting of essay-like arguments or reflections based on personal experiences or observations, can also be found in letters to the editor in periodicals, and in travel letters, where an author's personal experiences of their travels became the springboard for more or less self-contained essays on a more general issue.[40] Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (1774), which were sold to the press after his death by his son's widow, are a famous example of autobiographical essays embedded in everyday private letters. Chesterfield, who intended his illegitimate son to follow him into polite society and political office, described his own life experiences and gave advice for his son's conduct based on those

[39] H. Binkley, 'Essays and letter-writing', *PMLA*, 41:2 (June 1926), 342.

[40] On travel letters, see E.T. Bannet, 'Letters' in A. Pettinger and T. Youngs (eds.), *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 115–27; on letters to the editor, see E.T. Bannet, 'Haywood's *Spectator* and the female world' in D. Newman and M. Wright (eds.), *Fair Philosopher: Haywood and the Female Spectator* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2006); and on travel and the essay, see B. Schaff's discussion in Ch. 30 of this volume ('A brief history of travel and the essay').

experiences, which often took the form of embedded essays. At publication, some autobiographical segments were editorially excised, together with judgments that would embarrass living people.[41] But autobiographical material and thematic essays were also immediately extracted from the *Letters* and printed separately, as in the example below, which is taken from a popular epitome of the original volumes. The editor's preface to *Lord Chesterfield's Maxims* (1774) provides autobiographical background information extracted from the *Letters*:

> I had a strong desire to please and was sensible that I had nothing but the desire. I therefore resolved, if possible, to acquire the means too. I studied attentively and minutely the dress, the air, the manner, the address, and the turn of conversation of all those whom I found to be people of fashion, and most generally allowed to please. I imitated them as well as I could ... I began the world not with a bare desire, but with an insatiable thirst of popularity, and applause ... I was a Proteus, and assumed every shape, in order to please them all: among the gay, I was the gayest; among the grave, the gravest; and I never omitted the least attentions of Good-breeding, or the least offices of friendship, that could either please, or attach them to me; and accordingly I was soon connected with all the men of any fashion or figure in town.[42]

The body of this compiler's text consists of a series of impersonal discursive essays, also extracted from the *Letters*, on such general topics as history, chronology, knowledge, idleness, good breeding, letter writing, and envy, arranged in alphabetical order by subject as in commonplace books. Here is part of the essay on 'Pleasing':

> The art of pleasing is a very necessary one to possess; but a very difficult one to acquire. To do as one would be done by, is the surest method of pleasing. Observe carefully what pleases us in others, and probably the same things in us will please others. If we are pleased with the complaisance and attention of others, to our humours, our tastes or our weaknesses; the same complaisance and attention on our parts to theirs will equally please them. Let us be serious, gay, or even trifling, as we find the present humour of the company: this is an attention due from every individual to the majority.

[41] C. Mao, 'Manners and manuscripts: the editorial manufacture of Lord Chesterfield in "Letters to his Son"', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 99:1 (March 2005), 37–69.

[42] P.D. Stanhope, *Lord Chesterfield's Maxims: A New Plan of Education on the Principles of Virtue and Politeness* (London: F. Newbery, 1774), pp. vii, ix–xi.

> Of all things, we should never think of entertaining people with our own personal concerns, or private affairs; though they are interesting to us, they are tedious and impertinent to everyone else; besides, we cannot keep our own private affairs too secret. Whatever we think our own excellencies may be, let us not affectedly display them in company; nor labour, as many people do, to give that turn to the conversation, which may afford us an opportunity of exhibiting them. If they are real, they will infallibly be discovered, without our pointing them out ourselves, and with much more advantage.[43]

The irony was that once published, Chesterfield's *Letters* did what they here and elsewhere instruct his son not to do: entertain people with his personal concerns and show off his own cleverness. The *Letters* earned him a great deal of posthumous public opprobrium as a result. But the particular interest of this passage lies in its re-presentation in more generalised and impersonal essay form of much of what Chesterfield and Boswell say about politeness, imitation, and the utility of acquiring proper manners in first-person, auto-biographical texts – letters and diaries, respectively.

This reproduction of material in different genres and formats in essays, letters, and diaries is a curious characteristic of the times. It shows that Adam Smyth's discovery of 'a process of intertextuality that was central to early modern life-writing', where 'information was transferred from text to text and was revised in the process', and where selfhood might be constructed 'by looking out into the world, rather than within', extends across these three genres.[44] Circulation of rewritten contents and of reformulated representations of the self, further demonstrate the proximity and mutual permeability of letters, diaries, and essays as they developed in early print culture.

[43] Ibid., p. 67.
[44] A. Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 212, 11, 8.

9

The Art of Criticism: Essay as Citation

JACOB SIDER JOST

When Alexander Pope published his *Essay on Criticism* in 1711, his title was the first to combine two words that had entered the English language just over a century earlier. Pope was an epochally gifted phrasemaker, and the title of his *Essay* has been an influential one, echoed inter alia in the title of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865) and the scholarly journal of the same name founded at Oxford by F.W. Bateson in 1951. The term 'essay' itself can be dated precisely: like 'utopia', it names a genre that emerges from a single influential work. The first edition of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* appeared in French in 1580 (with an English translation by the Renaissance man of letters John Florio in 1603). When Francis Bacon chose to name his own 1597 volume *Essayes*, he established the word in English as an emergent genre.[1] The term 'criticism' is more difficult to place. In the sense that Pope used it, it emerged gradually over the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From the 1660s through the 1690s, John Dryden popularised the term in numerous essays, dedications, defences, treatises, and other works, asserting his status, in a field of rivals, as the pre-eminent English literary critic.

Much connects 'essay' and 'criticism' beyond their shared origin in Elizabethan and Stuart England. Both originate as written records that preserve acts of reading and reception that are not themselves written. Early essayists typically understood their writings as a record (sometimes even imagined them as an excretory by-product) of reading, extraction, and digestion, allied to the older Renaissance tradition of the commonplace book.[2] Early works of criticism consisted of table talk and other sociable utterances by critics gathered

[1] For more in-depth discussion of this topic, see K. Murphy's 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' in this volume (Ch. 2).

[2] See A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3); S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and T. Tregear, 'Marvels and commonplaces in the Elizabethan anthologies', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 13:1 (2021), 49–66.

in urban, courtly, and learned settings.[3] Essays and criticism were both understood to make further acts of reading and reception possible: essays taught their readers how to read, while criticism made its readers into better critics. Both essays and criticism reached outward towards other texts, which the essay cited and summarised and which criticism analysed and judged. At the same time, both pointed inward to the mind and life of the author whose experiences and insights the essay records, and whose judgments and working intelligence criticism reveals. Montaigne's *Essais* are thus a cento of classical reading as well as the intimate document of an aging body and melancholy mind, while Dryden's critical prefaces comment not only on versification and dramatic plotting but also on his own process of composition within a milieu of influences, patrons, friends, rivals, and enemies.

This chapter begins by tracing the complicated relationship between the essay form and critical practice, suggesting that before any mapping can begin the territory needs to be unmapped. I then offer accounts of both terms that come together in the phrase 'critical essay', moving from Montaigne through Joseph Addison and Pope to the late eighteenth-century Shakespearean critic Elizabeth Montagu. My purpose is to trace the critical practice of in-sentence quotation back to the early modern essayists who mingled their own language with that of predecessor texts through citation, explication, paraphrase, translation, and judgment. Jonathan Kramnick has argued that in-sentence quotation, in which the critic integrates the words of a literary text into his or her own work through quotation, is central to the contemporary critical practice of close reading.[4] I show how the admiring transcription of classical authorities characteristic of Montaigne led to the more sociable and egalitarian citation of vernacular contemporaries in the eighteenth-century British essay, and ultimately to academic literary criticism. My own close readings in this chapter are intended to show how the formal development of the essay as a genre promoted the growth of close reading as the fundamental tool of critical literary analysis.

Unmapping 'Essays' and 'Criticism'

Samuel Johnson defines criticism in his *Dictionary of the English Language* as 'the art of judging literary performances', and one might identify several

[3] M. Gavin, *The Invention of English Criticism, 1650–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 3–18.

[4] J. Kramnick, 'Criticism and truth', *Critical Inquiry*, 47:2 (2021), 218–40.

different overlapping kinds of essays through which that art developed.[5] There were, for instance, digests of reading and observation in the tradition of Montaigne, and topical treatises such as Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769) and Dryden's *Of Dramatick Poesie* (1668). In another category were periodical papers like Addison's in *The Spectator* analysing *Paradise Lost*, a series which arguably began the tradition of belletristic criticism. Compared to predecessor discourses, such as 'poetics', criticism was more vernacular and less grammatically oriented. It was at home in the newly emerging world of periodical print, and it was more aware of itself as a synchronic dialogue taking place in writing and in sociable exchange in coffeehouses, theatres, courts, salons, and universities. But although the term was new, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics were also conscious inheritors of a continuous tradition that reached back through Renaissance humanism and the Middle Ages to classical models.[6] 'Criticism' became both a new name for long-established ways of talking about poetry and a set of genuinely novel practices.

Yet, not all essayists were critics and not all critics wrote essays. Periodical papers, as we find them collected in Alexander Chalmers's canon-forming, 45-volume anthology *The British Essayists* (1802–3), contain much criticism (and much talk about criticism and critics) in works like Addison and Richard Steele's *Tatler* (1709–11) and *Spectator* (1711–14), Johnson's *Rambler* (1750–2), and Henry Mackenzie's *Lounger* (1785–6); but it also reveals those papers to be cornucopias of moral and religious reflection, political comment, social observation, autobiographical narrative, and much else besides. Self-described essays across the early modern period in Britain, starting with Florio's translation of Montaigne, Bacon, and William Cornwallis, often contain little that directly anticipates later practices of literary criticism.

Conversely, both self-identified critics and other authors from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century whose works are clearly legible to us

[5] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), *s.v.* 'Critick. adj'. For the semantic history of words derived from the Greek *kritikos* in other modern languages, see K. Röttgers, 'Kritik' in O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, revised ed., 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2004), vol. 4, pp. 651–75. Of course, other senses of 'criticism' distinct from 'literary criticism' remain active today.

[6] See H. Power's 'Ancient influences on the essay' and Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay', both in this volume (Chs. 1 and 3, respectively); V. Brljak and M. Lazarus, 'Introduction: Poetics as classical reception', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 13:1 (2021), 1–8; G. Alexander, E. Gilby, and A. Marr, 'Introduction: Placing early modern criticism' in *The Places of Early Modern Criticism*, ed. Alexander, Gilby, and Marr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1–21.

as works of literary criticism make use of genres other than the essay. These include the commonplace book (Ben Jonson's *Timber: or Discoveries*, printed posthumously in 1641); the university lecture (Adam Smith's and Hugh Blair's lectures on rhetoric and belles-lettres in the 1750s and 1760s); the treatise (Lord Kames's 1762 *Elements of Criticism*); and the private letter (Lady Bradshaigh's comments on *Clarissa* to Samuel Richardson in the early 1740s).[7] Other works from the period resemble essays and are even referred to as 'essays' by readers and scholars, but strictly speaking claim other generic labels. One example is the public letter, such as the third earl of Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour. In a Letter to a Friend* (1709), or Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), addressed to Samuel Richardson. Another form the critical essay could take was the preface, as Mario Aquilina discusses elsewhere in this volume.[8] Such essays could preface one's own works – as in the case of playwrights like Dryden and Catharine Trotter, or poets like William Wordsworth in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* – or they could preface the works of others, such as Johnson's biographical essays collected in *Lives of the Poets* (1779), originally prefixed to a multi-volume collection of the works of the British poets he discusses. Thus, the well-worn track between the two concepts of 'essays' and 'criticism' is only one path in a wider generic network. As early as 1606, in George Chapman's comedy *Monsieur D'Olive*, the two terms stand side-by-side in a census of early modern wit: 'I will have my chamber the Rende-vous of all good wits ... Criticks, Essayists, Linguists, Poets.'[9]

The early critical essay included genealogies, such as Pope's history of criticism from Aristotle to William Walsh in the *Essay on Criticism*, or Voltaire's account of the epic from Homer to Milton in his *Essay upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations* (1727). Often, the critical essay included taxonomies: Dryden's comparison of French and English drama in *Of Dramatick Poesie*, Oliver Goldsmith's distinction between 'laughing' and 'sentimental' comedy in his 'Essay on the Theatre' (1773), or Friedrich Schiller's 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' (1795–6). Yet, our understanding of criticism will be little advanced by examining John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), which is as taxonomic an essay as

[7] On the letter as essay and essays embedded in letters, see E.T. Bannet's 'Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays' in this volume (Ch. 8).
[8] See M. Aquilano's 'The preface essay' in this volume (Ch. 29).
[9] G. Chapman, *Monsieur D'Olive* (London: W. Holmes, 1606), sig. B2v.

one can find. When should we defer to the usage of early modern writers, and when imitate their own licence in excluding 'essays' and 'criticism' that do not fit our needs?[10]

Mapping Essays and Criticism

In defining *criticism*, a somewhat expanded restatement of Johnson's dictionary definition, which itself both quotes and rephrases Dryden's definition of criticism as 'a standard of judging well', does in fact comprehend a coherent concept in the long eighteenth century that is a clear ancestor of literary criticism today.[11] 'Criticism' in this sense is a judicative, explicative, and appreciative encounter with literature (taking 'literature' in the then-embryonic and now-regnant sense of texts, such as poems or plays, whose claim on its reader is primarily aesthetic).[12] Early criticism often engages with such texts as a canon or tradition, organised into categories or historical narratives. Binary oppositions are common: history versus poetry, ancient versus modern, French versus English, blank verse versus rhyme, tragedy versus comedy, wits versus dunces, older romances versus the works of 'our present writers', poetic diction versus the 'language really used by men'.[13] Critical histories may be declinist, lamenting the inferiority of the present day in comparison to a golden age, either classical or Elizabethan, but are more often progressive and triumphal, celebrating the 'improvement' of poetry or narrating a *translatio imperii* that carries the excellence of the Greek and above all Roman classics to modern Britain.

As for defining the essay, the period's most significant critical essayists found the genre easier to describe than to define. Dryden identified the essay with open-ended exploration rather than authoritative instruction when he

[10] For the power of digital methods to tell the history of genre without deferring to historical genre terms (e.g., to identify a tradition of science fiction before the invention of the term 'science fiction'), see T. Underwood, *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), and S. Domsch, *The Emergence of Literary Criticism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Discourse Between Attacks and Authority* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), which makes extensive use of non-canonical texts and authors.

[11] Dryden's phrase is from his 'Apology for heroic poetry and poetic license' in *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W.P. Ker, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), vol. 1, p. 179.

[12] T. Ross, 'The emergence of "literature": making and reading the English canon in the eighteenth century', *ELH*, 63:2 (1996), 397–422.

[13] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 4 (31 March 1750) in W.J. Bate and A.B. Strauss (eds.), *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vols. 3–5:*The Rambler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 3, p. 19; and W. Wordsworth, 'Preface' in *Lyrical Ballads, 1798 and 1802*, ed. F. Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 97.

said that his *Of Dramatick Poesie* was 'sceptical' rather than 'magisterial'.[14] Addison distinguished essays from other kinds of writing by their unsystematic 'wildness'.[15] For David Hume, the essayist was 'an Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation'.[16] Johnson defined the essay as 'a loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece'.[17] Such descriptions furnish insufficient information about the actual formal features of the texts that the period called essays, but they do converge on ideas that are important to understanding the critical essay: serendipity, spontaneity, informality, personal perspective.

With Johnson's definition of criticism and the period's more diffuse description of the essay in place, we may attempt a taxonomy of the early critical essay in three broad groupings. First, there is a primarily seventeenth-century tradition of works, such as Florio's translation of Montaigne, Bacon's *Essayes*, Abraham Cowley's *Several Discourses, by Way of Essays* (1668), the *Miscellanea* of Sir William Temple (1680, 1690), or Lady Grace Gethin's *Reliquiae Gethinianae* (1699), that emerge from the practice of the Renaissance commonplace book. Often short but varying in length, such texts are the record of individual encounters with valued moral, historical, philosophical, and poetic works, sometimes combined with introspection or autobiography; they are topically organised and only sporadically narrative. Following the example of Montaigne, they are unapologetically digressive and miscellaneous in organisation. Some, like Margaret Cavendish's *The World's Olio* (1655), take topics from the commonplace tradition but emphasise the essayist's own reflections, quoting only rarely from other authors. These essays are primarily in prose, although Cowley, for instance, includes among his *Essays* a Pindaric ode whose 'Numbers loose and free' are, he implies, the poetic equivalent to this prose tradition, and Mary Chudleigh's *Essays Upon Several Subjects, in Prose and Verse* (1710) is written prosimetrically, breaking from prose into couplets or verse stanzas.[18]

[14] Dryden, *Essays*, ed. Ker, vol. 1, p. 214 (emphasis in original).
[15] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 476 (5 September 1712) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 4, p. 185.
[16] D. Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller, revised ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), p. 535.
[17] Johnson, *Dictionary*, *s.v.* 'Essay, n.s'; T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form (1958)', trans. B. Hullott-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 152. See too, N. Phillips and S. Logsdon's 'Loose sallies of the mind: distraction and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 12).
[18] A. Cowley, *Essays, Plays, and Sundry Verses*, ed. A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), p. 391.

The second category of critical essay consists of more focused treatises, in prose or verse, that 'assay' to comprehend a single topic or subject, such as a genre, author, character, or criticism itself. Vital from the mid-seventeenth century to the Romantic era and beyond, this group includes essays mentioned above (Dryden's *Of Dramatick Poesie*; Shaftesbury's *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*; Pope's *Essay on Criticism*; Voltaire's *Essay upon the Epick Poetry*) as well as Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756–82) and Maurice Morgann's *Essay on the Dramatick Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777). These essays are not necessarily committed to the irregular, digressive style. Indeed, when Johnson acclaims Dryden as the 'father of English criticism', he lauds *Of Dramatick Poesie* precisely for being the first 'regular . . . treatise on the art of writing'.[19] But they share with other critical essays a sense of being an attempt, not a systematic final account.

The third critical essay tradition is the essay in the form of the periodical paper. Although it draws on practices developed in late seventeenth-century periodicals such as John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* (1691–6), it is above all the invention of Addison and Steele, pioneered in *The Tatler*, perfected in *The Spectator*, and followed, among many others, by Eliza Haywood in *The Female Spectator* (1744–6) and Samuel Johnson in *The Rambler* (1750–2). Such periodical essays differed from the previous two types of critical essay in their form of publication: as individual numbers, issued at regular intervals, followed (if the paper be successful) by publication in a collected edition. From the 1730s on, they would also be reprinted in monthly magazines such as *The Gentleman's Magazine*. They differ in their use of collaborative authorship, inserted epistles, narrative, allegory, and narrating personae. Notable examples of embedded narratives and allegories include Steele's story of Inkle and Yarico in *Spectator* no. 11 and Johnson's allegory of truth, falsehood, and fiction in *Rambler* no. 96. This, again, is the periodical tradition canonised by Chalmers's *British Essayists*.

These three groupings of the critical essay are not strictly distinct. The Montaignian synthesis of commonplace citation and autobiography is evident, for example, in Jonson's *Timber* and Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, both written in the treatise mode of Voltaire and Warton.

[19] Johnson, 'The life of Dryden' in J.H. Middendorf (ed.),*The Lives of the Poets*, The Works of Samuel Johnson, Vols. 21–23 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), vol. 21, p. 476. On Dryden's form, see S. Sherman, 'Dryden and the theatrical imagination' in S. Zwicker (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 15–36.

Digressive, citational essays and systematic essays also shaded together in the prefaces and discourses of Dryden, for instance. A half-century later, Hume's *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (1741–2) blends the essay-treatise mode with the belletristic style of the Addisonian periodical paper tradition. A centripetal gravity holds these different kinds of critical essays together, even drawing them into contact and commixture.

Everyone a Critic: Quotation in the Critical Essay

As noted, my attempt at a wide-ranging taxonomy of the genre has many precedents in the critical essays of the period. The same is true of what follows: my readings of Montaigne, Addison, Pope, and Montagu follow in the footsteps of early modern essayists' own acts of citation, explication, and judgment. I begin with 'Of Cato the Younger', one of Montaigne's shortest, earliest essays, first published in 1580. The essay considers questions of moral judgment, human difference, historical change, the limits of communication, and the power of poetry, yet even the expanded text in the posthumous 1595 edition of the essays takes up only two folio pages in Florio's English translation of 1603. Montaigne opens by disavowing the 'common error' of judging others by one's own moral standard. In particular, he dissents from the moral psychology of his 'dull and leaden' age, which reduces all actions, even 'those that bear a show of virtue', to 'profit, glory, custom, fear, and other like strange causes'. Machiavellian readings of others' motivations are cheap and easy: 'Let any man present me, with the most excellent and blameless action, and I will oppose it with fifty vicious and bad intentions, all which shall carry a face of likelihood.'[20] Rather than detecting base motivations in this way, Montaigne aspires to 'extol and magnify' virtue, even when he does not practise it himself.[21]

At this point, approximately halfway through, the essay starts to repeat itself, circling again through this opposition between panegyric and paranoia, the gold of the ancient world and Montaigne's own 'leaden' age. Then Montaigne cuts himself short: 'But my purpose is not here to treat this rich argument: I will only confront together the sayings of five Latin poets upon

[20] M. Montaigne, *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike, and Millitarie Discourses of Lord Michaell de Montaigne*, trans. J. Florio (London: E. Blount, 1603), p. 114. I have modernised Florio's spelling and capitalisation throughout this chapter.

[21] Ibid., p. 114. My reading has profited from M. Cohen, 'Montaigne and the birth of aesthetics: a reading of "De jeune Caton"', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 30:1 (2008), 32–51; and Tregear, 'Marvels and commonplaces'.

Cato's commendation.'[22] He resolves to stop worrying about the moral inferiority of the present, and instead to quote verses that extol and magnify ancient virtue. The five quotations will be presented in ascending order of their poetic power, and Montaigne dictates in advance how 'a gentleman well-bred' ought to judge each. These judgments rise from intellectual assessments (the first two are 'somewhat languishing', and the third 'more vigorous, but suppressed by the extravagance of force') into intense, involuntary emotional and somatic responses. At the fourth quotation, the critic will 'through admiration join hands' with the author, and at the fifth the reader 'will be much amazed, he will be much amated', that is to say overwhelmed, stupefied.[23]

Before this amazement can come about, however, a digression added by Montaigne in his final round of revisions reflects on the nature of poetry and our response to it. He asserts that it is difficult to judge poetry because poetry at its best, 'the good and lofty, the supreme and divine', is 'beyond rules, and above reason'.[24] Montaigne describes a stance of distanced, attentive contemplation, a 'constant, quick-seeing, and settled look' that could have been dictated by philosophers of disinterested aesthetic perception from Kant to Jerome Stolnitz.[25] But he then throws it out the window: such an observer 'can no more see and comprehend' the beauty of poetry than 'the splendour of a lightning flash'.[26] Instead, he turns to another conceit: just as a needle touched by a magnet itself becomes magnetic, able to draw another needle after it, the overmastering power of poetry to 'prick and pain' passes from person to person, from poet to performer to audience. Montaigne testifies that poetry has had the power to 'transport and transpierce' him from his own infancy.[27]

A noble equestrian metaphor – 'here our Gallants are in their full career' – at last introduces the five Latin quotations in praise of Cato the Younger. They follow a conventional ranking of classical poetic merit: Martial and Manilius finish fifth and fourth, Lucan shows, Horace places, and Virgil wins. The modern reader will likely not find the final quotation *his dantem jura Catonem* ('with Cato giving them laws') as sublime as Montaigne might have expected, and a busy couplet ('Chief justice *Cato* does decree / Laws that for

[22] Montaigne, *Essayes*, p. 115. [23] Ibid., p. 115. [24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. See also I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987); and J. Stolnitz, '"The aesthetic attitude" in the rise of modern aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36:4 (1978), 409–22.
[26] Montaigne, *Essayes*, p. 115.
[27] Ibid. Montaigne draws upon Plato's *Ion*, though he does not cite it by name.

righteous souls should be') does the Latin phrase no favours in Florio's translation.[28] But it provides a fitting, resonant conclusion to the essay's reflections on virtue and exemplarity. Cato, in Virgil's *Aeneid* book 8, is a carved figure, depicted on the shield of Aeneas giving laws to good souls in the underworld. On Aeneas's shield he is juxtaposed with the wicked Catiline, who is shown in the previous line trembling before the Furies. Virgil's ekphrasis exposes the same moral stances as Montaigne's essay, with Catiline as the ill-intentioned Machiavellian and Cato as the upright man of virtue. And it celebrates Cato not as great or unconquered in death, as the lesser poets of the four previous quotations do, but as a magnetic leader, drawing an elect following (*secretos pios*).[29] As Montaigne invents the genre of the essay, then, 'Of Cato the Younger' shows that its defining features – its autobiographical voice and openness to first-hand testimony, its citation and digestion of other texts – matter greatly in reasoning about the nature of poetry and in offering concrete judgments about and responses to particular poems. He models what over the following century comes to be called *critique* in French and 'criticism' in English.

For Montaigne, Virgil's phrase *his dantem jura Catonem*, depicting Cato as a judge, was itself the object of rapturous critical judgment. A bit over a century later, Alexander Pope translated and transformed the same phrase, taking the Roman lawgiver's *jura* to refer not to moral and civic precepts but, more explicitly, to the act of criticism itself. The context was a fraught exchange with a rival. In December 1711, a *Spectator* paper by Addison had appeared with an extensive discussion of Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, published five months earlier. Addison had found much to praise. *Spectator* no. 253 judges Pope's *Essay* 'a Masterpiece in its kind', and Addison approvingly quotes and explicates several moments, such as the couplet modelling the inept use of alexandrines (lines with an extra foot at the end of iambic pentameter stanzas or verse paragraphs): 'A needless Alexandrine ends the song, / That like a wounded snake drags its slow length along'.[30] Pope, as Addison points out, has 'exemplified several of his Precepts in the very Precepts themselves'.[31] But Addison begins with a significant criticism: Pope is too forward in 'attacking the Reputation of all his Brothers in the Art', which includes both poets and critics.[32] Quoting a poem by John

[28] Ibid., p. 115.
[29] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H. Fairclough, revised by G.P. Goold, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), vol. 2, p. 106 (8.670).
[30] Addison, *Spectator*, no. 253 (20 December 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 2, p. 483–4.
[31] Ibid., p. 484. [32] Ibid., p. 482.

Denham in praise of the playwright John Fletcher, he impugns the *Essay on Criticism* with the 'foul Guilt / Of Eastern Kings, who to secure their Reign / Must have their Brothers, Sons, and Kindred Slain'.[33]

Addison's ambivalent response to Pope's poem, admiring its art but criticising its spirit, is a synecdoche of the complex relationship between the two men. They shared both public and private gestures of esteem: the two corresponded, Pope wrote a laudatory prologue to Addison's tragedy *Cato* in 1713, and Addison praised Pope's Homer translation (alongside Dryden's Virgil) in a *Freeholder* essay of 1716. They also exchanged slights and acts of aggression, the most virtuosic of which was a portrait of Addison written by Pope in 1715 but not published until years later, after Addison's death.[34] In *Spectator* no. 253, which we have been discussing, Addison had praised Pope but also accused him of critical jealousy. He had compared him, through the quotation of Denham above, to a fratricidal Ottoman despot. The comparison must have stung, and it stuck in Pope's mind. Deploying the same conceit, Pope's verse response likewise offers praise, only to level the same accusation of jealousy:

> But were there One whom better Stars conspire
> To form a Bard, and raise his Genius higher . . .
> Should such a One too fond to Reign Alone,
> Bear like the Turk, no Brother on the Throne
> View him with Jealous, yet with Scornful Eyes,
> And Hate for Arts, which caus'd himself to Rise;
> Damn with faint Praise, Assent with Civil Leer,
> And without Sneering, teach the Rest to Sneer[35]

In the final six lines of this satirical portrait of Addison, written four years after Addison's pointed review of the *Essay on Criticism*, Pope deploys a simile that translates the Virgilian tag (*his dantem jura Catonem*, 'with Cato giving them laws') that Montaigne had praised so extravagantly in 'Of Cato the Younger'. Pope's target,

[33] J. Denham quoted in ibid., p. 482.

[34] On Pope and Addison's relationship, as well as the text and history of the attack by Pope on Addison discussed below (the so-called 'Atticus lines') see N. Ault, *New Light on Pope* (London: Methuen, 1949), pp. 101–27. They were written in 1715, first published in 1722, first acknowledged by Pope in 1727, and are best known from a revised version of 1734 printed in Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, with the name of Addison replaced by 'Atticus'.

[35] A. Pope, 'Atticus lines' in Ault, *New Light on Pope*, p. 101 (ll. 7–8, 11–16).

> Like Cato, gives his little Senate Laws
> And sits attentive to his own Applause;
> While Wits and Templars every Sentence raise,
> And Wonder with a Foolish face of Praise:
> Who but must Grieve, if such a One there Be,
> Who would not Weep, if Addison were He?[36]

Pope shrinks the Roman republican whose virtue Montaigne admires, and whose heroic suicide Addison had represented in his neoclassical tragedy *Cato*, of two years previous, into the figure of the playwright himself, surrounded by a little senate of sycophantic Whig witlings, gathered at Button's coffeehouse where Addison was wont to hold forth.

Like parallel mirrors, the symmetry of these attacks creates a mise en abyme, or scene of self-reflection, as Pope's satire in heroic couplets criticises his contemporary Addison for an essay that quotes heroic couplets to criticise Pope for having criticised his contemporaries too harshly in *An Essay on Criticism*. Pope and Addison imitate and borrow from each other, just as they imitate and borrow from the ancients. They share with Montaigne a belief in the enduring normative force of the classical world, but they do not see it as irretrievably distant or even radically different from their own. Pope's *Essay on Criticism* advises modern poets to imitate the ancients ('To copy nature is to copy them') precisely because the ancients are themselves critics and imitators. It describes Virgil as the author of an epic verse 'comment' on Homer, a critic in short, just as Cato is depicted as a critic dispensing 'laws'.[37]

In the same number of *The Spectator* in which he reviews Pope, Addison celebrates Virgil for being a sociable member of his metropolitan literary milieu: 'The greatest Wits that ever were produced in one Age, lived together in so good an Understanding, and celebrated one another with so much Generosity, that each of them receives an additional Lustre from his Contemporaries'; Virgil and Horace were 'friends and Admirers of each other'; indeed, Virgil was on good terms with '*Gallus, Propertius, Horace, Varius, Tucca* and *Ovid*'.[38] Addison here takes the ethos of the *Spectator* essays – collaborative, sociable, metropolitan, built on personal relationships and wider publication as a blend of poetic, narrative, moral, religious, and, not least, critical writing – and projects it back to the age of Augustus, from

[36] Ibid., p. 101 (ll. 25–30).
[37] A. Pope, *Essay on Criticism* in *The Major Works, including The Rape of the Lock and The Dunciad*, ed. P. Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 17–39.
[38] Addison, *Spectator*, no. 253 in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 2, p. 482.

whence it can be reborrowed as a model to emulate, and a pointed lesson to Pope. In the age of the periodical essay, everyone, whether ancient or modern, is a critic.

The Birth of Close Reading

Although Addison's and Pope's language moves from one exclusively masculine space to another, from Augustan Rome to Ottoman dynastic struggle, to competition between 'Brother' writers, the critical essay tradition at the time was broader. From its late sixteenth-century origins, the essay addressed and reached audiences that included women as well as men. Montaigne's 'Of the Institution and Education of Children' addressed Diane de Foix, Duchess of Gerson, and the definitive posthumous edition of his *Essais* (1595) was edited by Marie de Gournay, a humanist close to Montaigne, a 'daughter by alliance', as Florio put it.[39] Florio's 1603 translation, titled *Essayes*, was dedicated to no fewer than six noble female patrons, including several who were his former language pupils.

Although English women appear only rarely as authors of essays in the seventeenth century, we may look to Margaret Cavendish's miscellaneous, essayistic *World's Olio* and to the learned polyglot and teacher Bathsua Makin's *Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673) as early examples.[40] Essays by women, including Eliza Haywood, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Charlotte Lennox, proliferated in eighteenth-century Britain, though they often show a defensive awareness that the figure of the 'author' remained normatively male.[41] Meanwhile, from the 1670s on, female playwrights such as Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley began writing criticism in the essayistic paratexts of Restoration drama, such as dedications, prologues, and epilogues.[42] By the time Elizabeth Montagu published her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* in 1769, women critics and essayists were a well-established part of British print culture and London intellectual life.

Montagu's *Essay*, which passed through a half-dozen editions, is part of an eighteenth-century tradition of criticism celebrating Shakespeare as a moving

[39] Montaigne, *Essayes*, sig. A2r.
[40] See also M. Emre's discussion in 'Anger, rhetoric, and early women essayists' in this volume (Ch. 6).
[41] M. Powell, *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), pp. 131–92.
[42] See Gavin, *Invention of English Criticism*, pp. 46, 74–93.

poet of moral sensibility and a national treasure whose genius outstripped classical and French competitors.[43] It was explicitly written as a refutation of Voltaire's attacks on Shakespeare, and it was also an interlocutor for and competitor with Johnson's preface to his Shakespeare edition, published four years earlier. Like a twenty-first-century academic who must do justice to fellow scholars before turning to a primary text, Montagu opens her introduction with a paraphrase of Pope, and proceeds to quote Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674) and John Milton's *Il Penseroso* (1645). The first quoted lines of dramatic poetry appear half a dozen pages into the first chapter, 'On the Drama', and they are by Pope, not Shakespeare.

Montagu's essay develops a reading of Aristotelian catharsis that emphasises the moral purpose of tragedy, arguing that the vividness and immediacy of dramatic representation make it superior to the epic (the other genre that Aristotle considers in the *Poetics* as a morally efficacious appeal to the emotions). To develop this point, Montagu quotes from Pope's prologue to Addison's *Cato*:

> To the muse of tragedy, therefore, Mr Pope has assigned the noble task
>
> To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
> To raise the genius, and to mend the heart.
> To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
> Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.
>
> He ascribes such power to a well-wrought scene, as to ask,
>
> When Cato groans, who does not wish to bleed?
>
> He would not have supposed the death of Sarpedon, to have had an equal effect on any reader of the Iliad; such enthusiasm is to be caught only from the stage, and is the effect of strong-working sympathy, and passions agitated by the peculiar force and activity of the dramatic manner.[44]

Nearly two centuries after Montaigne, essayists were still quoting poetry in praise of the younger Cato, still exploring the contagious power of language to transmit emotion; but Montagu's words stand in a very different

[43] J. Hawley, 'Shakespearean sensibilities: women writers reading Shakespeare, 1753–1808' in J. Batchelor, T. Cain, and C. Lamont (eds.), *Shakespearean Continuities: Essays in Honour of E.A.J. Honigmann* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), pp. 290–304; E. Eger, '"Out rushed a female to protect the bard": the Bluestocking defense of Shakespeare', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65:1–2 (2002), 127–51.

[44] E. Montagu, *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, Compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets* (London: J. Dodsley, 1769), p. 30.

relationship to Pope's than Montaigne's do to his five Latin poets. Her language is grammatically and stylistically integrated with Pope's. Her direct object, 'noble task', governs three of Pope's infinitives ('to wake ... to raise ... to make'). She imitates the adjective-noun formula that appears twice in his four lines ('tender strokes', 'conscious virtue'). Her verb 'to ask' introduces Pope's question, 'who does not wish to bleed?' She uses the subjunctive mood to harmonise her opinions with Pope's: 'He would not have supposed the death of Sarpedon' to move readers the way audience members are agitated by the death of Addison's Cato, and by extension the tragic heroes of Shakespeare.[45] It is easy to see why Montagu's language is grammatically and semantically more closely woven with Pope than Montaigne's language had been with Virgil: Montaigne writes in French and quotes classical Latin; Montagu cites Pope as a fellow critic and Shakespearean in the English tradition. Her citations thus identify her as a recognisable predecessor of our own conventions of close reading.

I close, in the spirit of the early modern essay, with a tentative conclusion and an invitation to further critical exchange. The examples of Addison, Pope, and Montagu suggest that the early modern critical essay is the seedbed of modern academic criticism because it imagines a community of critics, including older authorities, but mainly composed of contemporaries and recent predecessors, whose judgments of literature (and of each other) can be cited, paraphrased, and integrated grammatically and rhetorically into new criticism. It is through these practices of critical citation, which descend from and transform the practice of classical quotation that Montaigne lays at the foundation of the essay mode, which others follow him in developing as (in the words of Theodor Adorno) the 'critical form *par excellence*'.[46]

[45] A plausible speculation: the endnotes in book 16 of Pope's translation of the *Iliad* annotate the death of the beloved son of Jove with sangfroid, translating a comment from Anne Dacier's French edition that discusses ancient traditions about his burial site. See A. Pope (trans.), *The Iliad of Homer*, 6 vols. (London: B. Lintott, 1715–20), vol. 4, pp. 310–11.

[46] Adorno, 'The essay as form', 166.

PART II

*

THE GREAT AGE OF THE BRITISH ESSAY

10

Essayistic Personae and Personhood

JAMES ROBERT WOOD

Over the long eighteenth century, essays published as part of a series, whether as stand-alone periodicals or in magazines, were conventionally credited to the literary labours of an essayistic persona.[1] These imaginary writers were usually identified as human beings, although the persona of Eliza Haywood's *The Parrot* (1746) is a prominent exception to the rule. Iona Italia shows how these figures became eccentric yet authoritative commentators on matters of morality and taste, while Manushag N. Powell examines how they articulated new ideas about authorship in a period in which the modern idea of the author was still under construction.[2] In this chapter, I explore how essayistic personae allowed essayists and their readers to grapple with the elusive concept of the person. As Lynn Festa observes in her recent book *Fiction Without Humanity*, 'the person is not necessarily human in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought: the category includes such nonhuman entities as corporations and excludes human beings – the enslaved, the poor, minors, and women under coverture – in certain contexts'.[3] As open fictions sustained over time, and embedded in the

[1] Denise Gigante and others refer to the fictional figure representing the author of an essay series as a persona. See Gigante's Introduction to *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology*, ed. D. Gigante (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. xv and *passim*; M.N. Powell prefers 'eidolon' for its precision in referring strictly to the writer or editor, rather than the other characters who appear in periodical essays. See *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), pp. 23–4. I prefer the term 'essayistic persona' because 'persona' was the term commonly used by writers across the eighteenth century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'eidolon' began to be used widely in English only in the early nineteenth century: *OED Online*, *s.v.* 'eidolon'.

[2] See I. Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13–18 and *passim*; and Powell, *Performing Authorship*, pp. 13–48 and *passim*.

[3] L. Festa, *Fiction Without Humanity: Person, Animal, Thing in Early Enlightenment Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 11.

same social worlds as their readers, essayistic personae were especially well suited for making sense of the person in all its protean multifariousness.

Essayistic personae tended to picture the person as a contingent entity that makes a unity out of a multiplicity. Their essays reflect not only on how corporate persons like the South Sea Company were formed from many investors and merchants, but also how individual selves were made up of many ideas and memories. My chapter begins with Richard Steele's playful undermining of the distinction between the person and the persona in *The Tatler* (1709–11) and traces the etymology that the two words share. In the second part of this chapter, I use Thomas Hobbes's theory of the person to examine how essayistic personae were preoccupied with corporate persons as beings composed of many individuals: often drawing attention to their own status as corporate persons that allowed many writers to write as one. The third part draws on John Locke's theory of personhood in exploring how essays treat personal identity as just as much a fiction as the corporate person, a concept that enables many thoughts and remembered experiences to be fused into a single whole.

Bickerstaff's Funeral and the Idea of the Person

In the seventh issue of *The Tatler*, Isaac Bickerstaff, the fictional astrologer to whom most of the essays in the periodical are credited, predicts his own death, and makes arrangements for his funeral. Before detailing his plans, he pauses to acknowledge that 'there are those who dispute, whether there is any such Real Person as *Isaac Bickerstaff* or not?'[4] Rather than revealing whether he is or is not a real person, Bickerstaff simply announces: 'I shall excuse all Persons who appear what they really are, from coming to my Funeral. But all those who are, in their Way of Life, *Personae* as the *Latins* have it, Persons assum'd, and who appear what they really are not, are hereby invited to that Solemnity.'[5] In doing so, Bickerstaff exploits the etymological entanglement of the words 'persona' and 'person', whose etymon was associated in antiquity with both funeral rites and theatrical performance.

As René Brouwer explains, the current scholarly consensus is that the Latin word *persona* derives from the masked figure named in the Etruscan

[4] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 7 (26 April 1709) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 65.
[5] Ibid.

language as 'Phersu', who is shown engaged in violent funeral games on wall paintings in the early sixth-century BCE Tomb of the Augurs. The Romans appear to have adopted the Etruscan word *phersuna* (meaning 'the mask belonging to Phersu'), pronouncing it as *persona*, and used it to refer to the mask that was worn at a funeral to represent the departed. Later, the word came into use as the Latin equivalent of the Greek *prosopon*: the mask worn by an actor in a play. By metonymic association, the word also came to signify the role played by the actor behind the mask. The senses of *persona* subsequently branched out in several directions: the word could refer to grammatical persons, persons recognised in law (as opposed to legal non-persons such as enslaved people), as well as that elusive something that makes people who they are.[6] The same senses attached to the English word 'person', which entered the language in the late thirteenth century.[7] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'persona' only begins to appear from the mid-eighteenth century in English. Bickerstaff, in 1709, still identifies *persona* as a Latin rather than an English word, although he uses the word in the sense that it would subsequently acquire in English: a person created through the act of performance.

Among the many *'Persons assum'd'* who join the procession at Bickerstaff's funeral are the retired actress Elizabeth Barry, cast in the lugubrious role of Bickerstaff's widow, Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff, who appears to be equally as real as Barry, and figures whose professions oblige them to maintain a gap between what they think and what they say – among them a projector, who presents his ludicrous schemes as lucrative investments, and a courtier, who flatters powerful figures at court whom he secretly despises. To adopt a persona is, at least in this essay, to be functionally dead: to vanish behind the unliving mask one presents to the world. But the prolixity of Bickerstaff's own essayistic performances in *The Tatler* suggest that there can be a good deal of life in the persona's living death.

As it happened, Bickerstaff's wit held out for 254 more numbers of *The Tatler* beyond the seventeenth, which, had his scheduled death taken place, would have been the last number of *The Tatler*. The Bickerstaff persona began its life as a rather featureless astrologer, under whose identity Jonathan Swift predicted the death of the actual astrologer and almanac maker John

[6] See R. Brouwer, 'Funerals, faces and Hellenistic philosophers: on the origins of the concept of the person in Rome' in A. LoLordo (ed.), *Persons: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 19–45.

[7] *OED Online*, *s.v.* 'person'.

Partridge.[8] But the Bickerstaff that appears in *The Tatler* acquires over the course of the periodical's run a spinster half-sister named Jenny Distaff (who is credited as the author of six numbers of *The Tatler* and is married in the seventy-ninth number), a familiar spirit named Pacolet (who acts as Bickerstaff's spy and messenger), relationships with real people (such as the perfumer and bookseller Charles Lillie and a waiter at the St James's coffee-house named Humphrey Kidney), as well as Irish ancestry: a nod to the birth country of both Steele and Swift, who were responsible for the Bickerstaff persona. One of the conceits of the periodical is that the open fiction of the Bickerstaff persona might have more life in it than many apparently real persons to be encountered in the streets of London. The implication is that the person may be just as much a fiction as the persona is. The person itself emerges over the course of *The Tatler* as a species of representation with tangible effects on the world.

Collective Persons

The theatrical understanding of a person as a being created in the act of representation lies at the centre of Thomas Hobbes's theory of the person. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes rests his concept of the person on the original theatrical senses of the Latin word *persona*, explaining that '*Persona* in Latin signifies the *disguise*, *or outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguises the face, as a mask or visard: and from the stage, has been translated to any representer of speech and action, as well as in tribunals, as theatres.'[9] For Hobbes, the person as a publicly recognised entity does not precede but rather comes into being through representation. He writes: 'A person is he, whose words and actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man, or of anything to whom they are attributed, whether truly or by fiction.'[10] Hobbes notes that individual human beings can represent themselves, in which case each person is acting as a 'natural person'.[11] But an individual can also represent another

[8] Swift had Bickerstaff double down on the truth of his prediction when Partridge made the mistake of protesting in his almanac that he was still alive. For a recent study of the Bickerstaff hoax, see J. McTague, '"There is no such man as Isaack Bickerstaff": Partridge, Pittis, and Jonathan Swift', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 35:1 (2011), 83–101.

[9] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 112; Hobbes's text has been modernised in this chapter.

[10] Ibid., p. 111. [11] Ibid.

individual, a plurality of people, or even an inanimate object, in which case they are acting as a 'feigned or artificial person'.[12]

Hobbes famously depicts the sovereign as an artificial person who represents and acts on behalf of all the people in a kingdom, and who, in so doing, stands for the commonwealth as a collective person. The transmogrification of many individuals into a collective body is memorably depicted in the frontispiece to Hobbes's book, in which a multitude of citizens is seen merging together to form the sovereign's physical body, who looms over the landscape topped by a head resembling King Charles I. Many essayistic personae of the long eighteenth century claim quasi-sovereign powers over their own readers, including the prerogative to bring collective persons within the body politic into being and legislate matters of art, manners, and learning.

Isaac Bickerstaff is the first of a long line of essayistic personae who assume the powers of the Roman censor, whose office involved, as Bickerstaff observes in *Tatler* no. 162, 'making frequent Reviews of the People, in casting up their Numbers, ranging them under their several Tribes, disposing them into proper Classes, and subdividing them into their respective Centuries' and undertaking 'to look into the Manners of the People, and to check any growing Luxury, whether in Diet, Dress, or Building'.[13] Bickerstaff performs his self-appointed role of Censor-General of the newly formed Great Britain by distinguishing 'into particular Bodies' types such as 'the *Dappers* and the *Smarts*, the *Natural* and *Affected Rakes*, the *Pretty Fellows* and the *very Pretty Fellows*' and animadverting on their vices and affectations.[14] He not only passes judgment on their behaviour but also fashions them into distinct groups that can be represented by a single social type.

Many of Bickerstaff's successors also claim the privileges of the censor as a figure who stands in judgment over a collective and distinguishes subdivisions within it, including Benjamin Johnson (a descendant of Ben Jonson) of Lewis Theobald's *The Censor* (1715), Sir Alexander Drawcansir (whose name is taken from an irascible character in George Villiers's 1672 play *The Rehearsal*) of Henry Fielding's *The Covent-Garden Journal* (1752), and Mr Town of Bonnell Thornton and George Colman's *The Connoisseur* (1754–6).[15] Mr Town's very name evokes 'the Town' in its sense as 'the

[12] Ibid. [13] Steele, *Tatler*, no. 162 (22 April 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 2, p. 403.
[14] Ibid., p. 403.
[15] For a survey of the essayistic personae who claim to be censors, see Italia, *Rise of Literary Journalism*, pp. 23–5.

several tribes of play-house and coffee-house Critics, and that collective body of them', to use Mr Town's definition of the phrase.[16]

This use of the term 'the town' had been satirised a few years earlier in Fielding's letter to his own *Covent-Garden Journal*. That letter describes a coffeehouse orator who continually invokes the authority of 'the *Town*', proclaiming that 'the *Town* would not bear it; the *Town* did not like it; the *Town* was offended; the *Town* damn'd it; the *Town* was the best Judge; the *Town* was out of Humour. In a Word, the *Town* did every Thing; the *Town* knew every Thing; and, to succeed in any Thing, a Man must please the *Town*'; the correspondent closes the letter by asking 'who, or what, is meant by this Word *Town*; What Sort of Animal it is. And what one is to understand by it.'[17] The *Town* of course exists in no single body, animal or human. But there was a sense in which eighteenth-century London was indeed a menagerie of constantly appearing, disappearing, and changing collective persons, the *Town* itself among them. Essayistic personae helped provide a taxonomic guide to the corporate bodies that helped shape social life and commerce, enabling essay readers to imagine themselves as operating within larger groups that acquired collective identities of their own.

Essayistic personae themselves often acted as collective persons gathering many writers together under a shared identity. In this respect, we could compare the essayistic personae of collectively authored essays to the corporate persons that Hobbes identifies as 'persons in law',[18] which included universities, churches, hospitals, and municipal authorities, as well as corporations created for the purposes of trade and profit.[19] In the case of *The Spectator*, the essays of Addison and Steele were augmented by Addison's cousin Eustace Budgell, and the editor, librettist, and poet John Hughes, all of whom wrote as Mr Spectator. Susan Fitzmaurice has found evidence in *The Spectator* that the fiction of a single author also helped forge a common collective style for the periodical's essay-writing team that was distinct from the individual styles of the writers who comprised it.[20] The closing essay of

[16] G. Colman and B. Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 58 (6 March 1755) in Colman et al., *The Connoisseur. By Mr Town, Critic and Censor-General*, 4 vols. (London: R. Baldwin, 1755–6), vol. 1, p. 345.

[17] H. Fielding, *Covent-Garden Journal*, no. 7 (25 January 1752) in B.A. Goldgar (ed.), *The Covent-Garden Journal and A Plan of the Universal Register-Office* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), pp. 55–6.

[18] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 155.

[19] See H.S. Turner, *The Corporate Commonwealth: Pluralism and Political Fictions in England, 1516–1651* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 14 and *passim*.

[20] S.M. Fitzmaurice, 'Mr Spectator, identity and social roles in an early eighteenth-century community of practice and the periodical discourse community' in P. Pahta, M. Nevala,

The Tatler (no. 271) and the one Steele wrote for the final number of *The Spectator*'s initial run (no. 555) explicitly acknowledged the collaborators who had contributed to the periodical under the identity of the essayistic persona.

These concluding acknowledgements of collective authorship soon became a tradition in the periodical essay. As Henry Mackenzie observed at the end of *The Mirror* (1779–80), whose essays were authored by Mackenzie and other members of Edinburgh's Mirror Club, 'in the *concluding number* of a *periodical publication*, it is usual to lay aside the assumed name, or fictitious character, to ascribe the different papers to their true authors, and to wind up the whole with a modest appeal to the candour or indulgence of the public'.[21] The final number of *The Connoisseur* provides a particularly elaborate example of this procedure. It reveals the main authors of the periodical to be two rather than one, with the dual authorship explained as having been hidden in plain sight for the entirety of the periodical's run in the anagram formed by the first three letters of the word 'town' ('two').[22] In the same number, George Colman and Bonnell Thornton indirectly acknowledge several other members of the Nonsense Club as contributors, among them the poet William Cowper.

Even *The Female Spectator* (1744–6), a periodical written most likely by Eliza Haywood alone, features a corporate identity in the form of the Female Spectator's Club. The Female Spectator, a former coquet now grown older and wiser, is the *prima inter pares* of an authorial collective that includes three other women – the married lady Mira, the Widow of Quality, and a maiden, the merchant's daughter Euphrosine. These three varieties of female personhood are presented as jointly authoring, along with the Female Spectator persona, the individual instalments of a series that appears 'under the general Title of *The Female Spectator*'.[23] The collective allows four female personae,

A. Nurmi, and M. Palander-Collin (eds.), *Social Roles and Language Practices in Late Modern English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010), pp. 29–54.

[21] H. Mackenzie, *Mirror*, no. 110 (27 May 1780) in Mackenzie et al., *The Mirror: A Periodical Paper*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1781), vol. 3, p. 338. On the Mirror Club, see C.E. Andrews, 'The Mirror Club: periodicals as tastemakers in eighteenth-century Scotland' in R. McLean, R. Young, and K. Simpson (eds.), *The Scottish Enlightenment and Literary Culture* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2016), pp. 171–84. On the role of the club in the essay tradition, see J. Mee and J. Buckley's account in this volume, 'Clubs and coffeehouses: sociability and the essay' (Ch. 11).

[22] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 140 (30 September 1756) in Colman et al., *The Connoisseur*, vol. 4, p. 274.

[23] E. Haywood, *Female Spectator*, no. 1 (24 April 1744) in A. Petit and R.S. Hanson (eds.), *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), vol. 2, p. 19; spelling of this edition modernised. Thanks to Denise Gigante for her suggestion about *The*

initially identified through their relationship to men (spinster, wife, widow, and maid), to create an alternative source of identity through their shared participation in the corporate person of the Female Spectator, who directs her readers to consider all four women 'only as several Members of one Body, of which I am the Mouth'.[24]

The second issue (published in book format) of *The Female Spectator* explains the modus operandi of this society of women, who set aside two evenings per week to meet. In the first, the women discuss the news they receive and consider what topics to pursue. In the second, they spread their different essays on the table, 'which being read over, everyone has the Liberty of excepting against, or censuring whatever she disapproves; nothing being to be exhibited to the Public, without the joint Concurrence of all'.[25] The four women are not just a counterpart to the all-male clubs attended by the essayistic personae of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*; they also model a form of corporate personhood that is explicitly gendered female. Thus, even when the authors of *The Female Spectator* appear to affirm the maxim that 'EVERY one knows a Wife is but the second Person in the Family: – A Husband is the absolute Head of it; – [and] can act in everything as he pleases', they are writing as an entity in which the limits on personhood afforded to women in the household and in public life can be collectively overcome.[26]

The essayistic persona as a literary device appeared in a period in which readers were increasingly aware of the power of corporate persons. The third number of *The Spectator*, describing Mr Spectator's dream of the alternatively flourishing and sickly state of the body of Lady Credit, for example, is inspired by a peek into the premises of the Bank of England, one of the corporations created in the Financial Revolution of the 1690s, wherein the Spectator finds himself 'not a little pleased to see the Directors, Secretaries, and Clerks, with all the other Members of that wealthy Corporation, ranged in their several Stations, according to the Parts they act in that just and regular Oeconomy'.[27] Two corporate persons meet here – Mr Spectator and the Bank of England – wraith-like figures that nevertheless influence the

Female Spectator as an alternative way for the four women to define themselves apart from their relationship to men.

[24] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 19.

[25] Haywood, *Spectator*, no. 2 (24 May 1744) in Petit and Hanson (eds.), *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 53.

[26] Haywood, *Spectator*, no. 16 (10 August 1744) in Petit and Hanson (eds.), *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 115.

[27] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 3 (3 March 1711) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 14.

cultural and commercial fortunes of the nation, the latter financing the expansion of empire and the trade in enslaved human beings, and the former reflecting on Britain's entanglements with empire and enslavement in his essays, most famously in no. 11, which tells the story of how the faithless Thomas Inkle sells Yarico, his Indigenous lover, into slavery.

Mr Spectator's predecessor, Isaac Bickerstaff, had previously invoked the loss of personhood under such conditions as slavery, and slavery-like conditions in England. At the end of *Tatler* no. 245, Bickerstaff quotes a letter supposed to have been written by 'a Black-moor Boy', who complains that he is forced to wear a collar by a lady who treats him as beneath her dog and parrot in dignity.[28] As Richmond P. Bond points out in a note to this paper, *The Tatler* had previously carried an advertisement for 'A Black Indian Boy, 12 Years of Age, fit to wait on a Gentleman'.[29] *The Tatler*, then, was itself imbricated in the erasure of the personhood of Black children working as servants in England. Bickerstaff prefaces the letter, however, by identifying himself as a 'Patron of Persons who have no other Friend to apply to', recognising the boy's personhood when nobody else will.[30] The transparently fictional and transitory natures of essayistic personae like Bickerstaff aided them in highlighting arbitrary exclusions of personhood, which could be denied to human beings at the same time that it was being bestowed on corporations.

Another advertisement originally printed at the end of *Spectator* no. 168, published on 12 September 1711, reminds us that many of the periodical's readers participated in corporate persons as shareholders. It announced a meeting at the Swan Tavern in Cornhill the following day, to be attended by all subscribers who had invested £1,000 or more in the South Sea Company, the corporation that was given the exclusive licence to sell enslaved people in the Spanish colonies in the New World and that was at the centre of the stock market crash known as the South Sea Bubble of 1720.[31] To buy, read, and discuss the periodical essays fronted by essayistic personae like Isaac Bickerstaff, the Female Spectator, or Mr Town was to similarly interact with fictional persons who could never be encountered in the flesh, but who nevertheless had lasting effects on the world they haunted.

[28] Steele, *Tatler*, no. 245 (2 November 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 3, p. 256.
[29] Quoted in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 3, p. 256, n. 26.
[30] Steele, *Tatler*, no. 245 in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 3, p. 256.
[31] See L. Lewis, *The Advertisements of The Spectator* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), p. 105.

Conscious Personhood

At first glance, John Locke's theory of the person in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), with its emphasis on consciousness rather than representation as the locus of personhood, seems diametrically opposed to Hobbes's. But Locke's and Hobbes's are alike in analysing the person as a being comprised of multiple elements. Locke's chapter 'On Identity and Diversity', added to the second edition of the *Essay* in 1694, defines the person as 'a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it'.[32] This definition appears to locate personhood in the inward communion of the mind with its own reflections and remembrances. But Locke notes later on in the chapter that the person 'is a Forensick Term appropriating Actions and their Merit; and so belongs only to intelligent animals capable of a Law, and Happiness and Misery'.[33] As a forensic term, the 'person' might be redefined as what can be *inferred* from outward evidence to be another mind's consciousness of its own thoughts and actions. Locke's theory of personhood as consciousness (both experienced from within and deduced from without) helps bring out the ways that the reader's apprehension of essayistic personae as thinking beings depends on the very same logical processes through which the mind makes coherent wholes out of myriad thoughts and experiences.

Min Wild has suggested that Locke's 'On Identity and Diversity' can be read as 'a charter for the use of personae' in the periodical essay, one that emphasises the role of imagination in the making not only of essayistic personae but also of personal identity itself.[34] This act of imagination in constituting the essayistic person as a single consciousness was exercised as much by readers as it was by writers. For if the essayistic persona often brought together many writers under the aegis of a single imaginary author, it was also a means of gathering together many 'lucubrations', to use Isaac Bickerstaff's favourite word for his essayistic meditations. Charles Lamb later drew attention to the function of the essayistic persona in tying together what might otherwise be a morass of disjointed papers in his review of

[32] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 335.
[33] Ibid., p. 346.
[34] M. Wild, *Christopher Smart and Satire: 'Mary Midnight' and the Midwife* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 25.

William Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* (1821), observing that 'A series of Miscellaneous Essays, however well executed in the parts, if it have not some pervading character to give a unity to it, is ordinarily as tormenting to get through as a set of aphorisms, or a jest-book.'[35]

Even if there is no single thread joining them, the serial essays of the long eighteenth century appear to acquire a coherence from the fiction that they all emanate from the mind of the fictional essayist. Essayistic personae did not need to be fleshed out as distinct personalities for this principle to work. Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler* (1750–2) keeps the character and circumstances of the person supposed to be writing the essays largely in the shadows. Instead, it counts on, and draws attention to, the ability of readers to produce an idea of the Rambler from the essays attributed to him. In *Rambler* no. 23, the Rambler reports that some readers 'were angry that the Rambler did not, like the Spectator, introduce himself to the acquaintance of the publick, by an account of his own birth and studies, and enumeration of his adventures, and a description of his physiognomy'.[36] But the Rambler goes on to report that other readers proceeded to fill in his character regardless, and 'began to remark that he was a solemn, serious, dictatorial writer, without sprightliness or gaiety, and called out with vehemence for mirth and humour'.[37] As James Boswell remarks at the end of his essay column *The Hypochondriack* (1777–83), 'a writer, though unknown, is always personified with sufficient distinctness by the imagination, so as to be the object of affection of one kind or another'.[38]

A readerly sense that the unity of the essayistic persona's consciousness bestowed a unity on the essay series could be relied upon even when the essayistic persona was not a human being. The persona of Eliza Haywood's essay periodical *The Parrot* is a Javanese parrot who shares a 'Tale-telling Inclination' with his human predecessors in the essay periodical tradition, including the gossipy Tatler (whose persona was Isaac Bickerstaff) and Female Tatler (whose persona was Phoebe Crackenthorpe).[39] Haywood's

[35] C. Lamb, review of the first volume of Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* (1821) in A. Phillips (ed.), *Charles Lamb: Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 215.

[36] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 23 (5 June 1750) in W.J. Bate and A.B. Strauss (eds.), *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vols. 3–5: *The Rambler* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 3, p. 129.

[37] Ibid.

[38] J. Boswell, *Hypochondriack*, no. 70 (August 1783) in M. Bailey (ed.), *The Hypochondriack*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1928), vol. 2, p. 299.

[39] E. Haywood, *Parrot*, no. 1 (2 August 1746) in Petit and Hanson (eds.), *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 184. On Haywood's *Parrot* see M.N. Powell, 'Parroting and the periodical: women's

parrot persona, capable of writing (dictating?) whole essays, has a philosophical precedent in the chapter on personal identity from Locke's *Essay*, in which Locke uses an anecdote about a Brazilian parrot who appears to be capable of not just imitating human speech but of carrying on an extended conversation with Prince Maurice of Nassau, in order to illustrate the point that it is possible to imagine an animal that could be recognised as a person in the sense of a self-aware consciousness.[40]

Apart from the parrot anecdote, Locke considers many other comic scenarios that show that the idea of a single human being, and personhood itself, are separate and distinguishable concepts. In one thought experiment, Locke considers the case of the consciousness of Socrates migrating into the mayor of Queensborough in order to demonstrate that the idea of a person depends neither on the idea of a single body persisting through time, nor on the temporal continuity of consciousness itself.[41] 'On Identity and Diversity' is one of the most obviously essayistic chapters of Locke's *Essay*, with its origins as a separately written piece (it was added to the second edition at the suggestion of the Irish philosopher and politician William Molyneux). In both its formal reliance on anecdotes and thought experiments and in its untethering of the idea of the person from the idea of the human being, the chapter fits in easily with the ludic essays of the long eighteenth century. The argument of Locke's chapter was in fact summarised in Eustace Budgell's *Spectator* no. 578, where it serves to preface a complicated oriental tale in which the consciousnesses of a Persian king successively inhabits the bodies of a doe, a nightingale, and a lapdog, before returning once more to his original body. Locke starts out from the premise that a more mundane form of metempsychosis takes place in the body of every conscious human being, as remembered experiences accumulate and are forgotten and the person changes in tandem with them.

Charles Lamb's essays written under the name of Elia merge the concept of person as a single self-aware consciousness with that of the corporate person. The first three essays in the series loosely correspond to Lamb's own

speech, Haywood's *Parrot*, and its antecedents', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 27:1 (2008), 63–91.

[40] For the parrot anecdote, see Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 333–4. For a discussion of the parrot anecdote, see J.R. Wood, *Anecdotes of Enlightenment: Human Nature from Locke to Wordsworth* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), pp. 47–51.

[41] The reference is to Thomas Middleton's play *Hengist, King of Kent; or, The Mayor of Quinborough* (c. 1616–20), in which a tanner is elected 'Mayor of Queenborough'. After the play, the title became a byword for 'A mayor who is attended by the full ceremony of his office, but has no real power or authority'. 'Queenborough mayor', *OED Online*, *s.v.*

experiences as a clerk in the South-Sea House (the headquarters of the South Sea Company), a visitor to (and wistful student at) Oxford University, and a pupil of Christ's Hospital, respectively. But in a note appended to the Elia essay that first appeared in the January 1823 issue of *The London Magazine*, a person identified as a friend of the now deceased Elia draws attention to the way the experiences of others have become mixed up with Elia's (and presumably also Lamb's), creating a kind of corporate consciousness. He observes that in Elia's previous essays,

> what he tells us, as of himself, was often true only (historically) of another; as in a former Essay (to save many instances) – where under the *first person* (his favourite figure) he shadows forth the forlorn estate of a country-boy placed at a London school, far from his friends and connections – in direct opposition to his own early history.[42]

After reading this, the reader can no longer be sure that any of Elia's experiences belong to him or to one of his acquaintances.

Elia's method, his friend explains, had been 'to imply and twine with his own identity the griefs and affections of another – making himself many, or reducing many unto himself'.[43] Readers familiar with Lamb's biography would have recognised the 'country-boy' in this essay, 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago', as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lamb's West Country schoolmate at Christ's Hospital. Lamb, like Elia, was born and bred a Londoner. Their experiences of Christ's Hospital (itself, like the South Sea Company and Oxford University, a corporate person) come together in the rhetorical figure of Elia's 'I'. But the 'Friend' of Elia (Lamb himself) also raises the possibility that the 'I' is *always* a rhetorical figure, even when the experiences one presents are experienced as one's own. The Elia essays – and the periodical and serial essays of the long eighteenth century as a whole – gravitate towards the tradition that Heather Keenleyside traces in *Animals and Other People*, in which 'Personification . . . is a figure that registers the sort of quasi-natural, quasi-figurative creatures that all animate beings are.'[44] Essayistic personae of the long eighteenth century tend to insinuate that there is no person without personification.

[42] C. Lamb, 'Preface, by a friend of the late Elia' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 151.
[43] Ibid.
[44] H. Keenleyside, *Animals and Other People: Literary Forms and Living Beings in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2016), p. 7.

Conclusion: Unfreezing the Person

I give James Boswell's persona from *The Hypochondriack* the last word, because he discovers in the melancholic condition of hypochondria an ungovernable multiplicity that mirrors the formally miscellaneous nature of the periodical essay. The title character begins the first number as an ex-hypochondriac, though he succumbs to the condition once more between the twenty-second and twenty-third numbers. In the thirty-ninth number, the Hypochondriack quotes Psalm 94:19 ('In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul') and muses that 'Language cannot better express uneasy perturbation of spirits caused by hypochondria than the Psalmist has here done. There is in the idea of multitude, disorder, fluctuation, and tumult; and whoever has experienced what I now suffer, must feel his situation justly and strongly described.'[45]

The painful multiplicity of hypochondria creates a desire for some state of uniformity, which the Hypochondriack comically imagines could be offered by what he calls, in the forty-seventh number published in August 1781, 'the New Freezing Discovery'. This was the vacuum-powered refrigeration device invented by the Scottish physician William Cullen, who had recently contributed essays to Henry Mackenzie's *The Mirror*. The Hypochondriack jokingly recommends Cullen's New Freezing Device as a cure for inconstancy:

> Inconstancy, impatience, and many other qualities in human nature, are often not only very troublesome to individuals, but prevent the best schemes and noblest plans from taking effect. For these qualities the New Freezing Discovery affords an effectual remedy. Is a person impatient or fretful? freeze him. Is his inconstancy such that he cannot remain of the same mind two days together? Whenever he is found in a proper frame, let him give his orders, and then shut him up in ice till such time as it is of no consequence whether he is constant or no.[46]

If the New Freezing Discovery worked as described, it would serve to guarantee that the self's multiple impulses can be made consistent with one another. Hypochondria is a pathological kind of inconstancy, although it emerges in *The Hypochondriack* as an intensification of the ever-changing nature of consciousness. Boswell's essays suggest that it is just as impossible to fix persons (hypochondriacal or not) once and for all as it is to fix

[45] Boswell, *Hypochondriack*, no. 39 (December 1780) in Bailey (ed.), *The Hypochondriack*, vol. 2, p. 41.

[46] Boswell, *Hypochondriack*, no. 47 (August 1781) in Bailey (ed.), *The Hypochondriack*, vol. 2, p. 103.

inconstancy with the New Freezing Discovery. The Hypochondriack can never be frozen so long as new essays continue to issue from him. The essayistic persona, as a new type of imaginary person, was especially apt at revealing the unfreezable fluidities of persons in general. By emphasising the fictionality of persons, essayistic personae helped readers imagine different (and potentially more just) configurations of personhood.

The essays and the essayistic personae of the long eighteenth century reveal the idea of the person, like the actor's mask, as a fixed shape imposed onto that which is in fact fluid and various. The particular hold essayistic personae had on the minds of their readers derived from their protean way of melting into larger collectives and resolving back again into individual entities. They required that readers, too, consider themselves as personae: sometimes as individual beings, and sometimes as components of a larger collective, whether on the scale of a club or a whole city. These essays placed their personae in real places and among real people in such a way as to blur the distinctions between the person and the persona.[47] In doing so, they drew attention to the ever-shifting nature of personhood, a concept that glided between its theatrical, legal, grammatical, and subjective significations and hovered like a spectre over individuals and institutions. The essayistic personae of the long eighteenth century were uniquely suited for uncovering the essential role that fiction plays in the fashioning of persons.

[47] On the essayistic persona as a figure who slips 'in and out of real spaces', see D. Gigante, 'Sometimes a stick is just a stick: the essay as (organic) form', *European Romantic Review*, 21:5 (2010), 560 and *passim*.

11

Clubs and Coffeehouses: Sociability and the Essay

JON MEE AND JENNIFER BUCKLEY

This chapter considers the relationship between the sociable world of the club and coffeehouse and the development of the eighteenth-century polite essay as a conversable form. It traces the nexus of sociability and essay writing associated with Sir Richard Steele and Joseph Addison's *The Tatler* (1709–11) and *The Spectator* (1711–14) from their original context into the early nineteenth century. While certainly influenced and informed by the clubs and social spaces they depicted and in which they were read, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* projected a less volatile and more 'conversable' social world than the one from which they emerged.[1] Famously desiring to bring philosophy out of colleges and into assemblies, clubs, and coffeehouses, as well as into tea-table conversations, *The Spectator*'s 'agreeable' sociability, based on the principle of 'pleasing each other when we meet', became part of the day-to-day lives of its many readers.[2]

John Gay declared of *The Spectator* that he expected to find 'the highest Satisfaction, in Reading it ... over a Dish of Tea, every Morning'.[3] In the influential account provided by Jürgen Habermas, such rituals of consumption, whether they took place in coffeehouses or in the conjugal space of the home, transformed the opinions of private citizens into a new kind of public sphere: 'periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion'.[4] From

[1] P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 4. On differing definitions of conversability across the eighteenth century, see J. Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[2] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 225 (16 September 1710) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 3, pp. 173–4.

[3] J. Gay, *The Present State of Wit, in a Letter to a Friend in the Country* (London: [s.n.], 1711), pp. 21–2.

[4] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 42.

this perspective, the essay was an important cog in 'an almost magical technology that turned coffee into public opinion'.[5] Among other things, this relative opening out of culture created opportunities for women to enter into literary sociability, even if many social spaces, including most clubs and coffeehouses, continued to effect various forms of exclusion, invisible or otherwise, sometimes on the very basis of principled politeness that Addison and Steele had implied – somewhat disingenuously – promoted equality between participants.[6] The polite essay in this regard mediated between a complex and often fractious social world and attempts to reform it.

Coffeehouse Sociability

Coffee entered British society in the early seventeenth century, and when the first London coffeehouse opened in Cornhill in the 1650s, it began to change the city's social landscape.[7] The first coffeehouses were closely linked to their roots in the Levantine trade and were far from being the places of polite discussion that they became in the mythos surrounding Addison and Steele. Everyday conviviality in the coffeehouse was far from always polite. Coffeehouses could be raucous places, especially where religion and politics intruded. King Charles II attempted to suppress them as they expanded and diversified, fearing that they created a breeding ground for sedition. The King ordered a proclamation to be issued against them in 1672, but like several later attempts at direct regulation it could not stem the tide of coffeehouse gossip. Spies listening for sedition were far from uncommon; king's messengers arrested customers for libels on the premises; coffeehouse keepers were brought before the courts for circulating false news in manuscript and print; and violence could flare in and around them. In 1679, John Dryden was beaten up outside Will's, where he presided over a circle of wits, for his attacks on the King and his mistresses in his 'Essay on Satire'.[8] By the 1680s, the rage of party was beginning to distinguish different houses as belonging to Whigs or Tories. Titus Oates was accordingly set upon for

[5] Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, p. 12.
[6] For a general introduction to the opportunities provided to women by *The Spectator* project, see E.J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce and Luxury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[7] M. Ellis, *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. xi. The first coffeehouse in the Christian world opened in Venice in the fifteenth century. See B. Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 30.
[8] Ellis, *The Coffee House*, pp. 154–5.

espousing radical Whiggery in the Amsterdam coffeehouse and retaliated by throwing hot coffee in the face of one of his attackers.[9]

Brian Cowan has shown how the British state reluctantly came to accept the 'practical reality of a lively and diverse clash of interest and opinions expressed in coffeehouse debates and coffeehouse media'.[10] Addison and Steele's project was part of a more general push towards the reformation of manners associated with politeness, and so part of the attempt to establish 'a norm in a world of often wild and incoherent sociabilities'.[11] The polite literary essay became a testing ground for the reformation of the values of sociability. Both Addison and Steele, for instance, pursued the story of an upholsterer, 'the greatest newsmonger in our quarter', across several issues of *The Tatler*. The political upholsterer, *The Tatler* made clear, was a warning 'for the particular Benefit of those worthy Citizens who live more in a Coffee-house than in their Shops'.[12] It is no surprise that the upholsterer is a Tory, but he is made to exemplify the vulgar coffeehouse politician whose voracity for information from the newspapers offends the limits of politeness.

From early on, the medium of print played an important part in the development of the coffeehouses. While the first coffeehouses distributed coffee as a medicinal drink, by the eighteenth century they were also being founded on the basis that they would offer inexpensive access to books, newspapers, and pamphlets, either by creating libraries or by freely providing copies for patrons to consult.[13] In his *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defined a coffeehouse as 'A house of entertainment where coffee is sold, and the guests are supplied with news papers'.[14] While Johnson emphasises the correlation between coffee and news, patrons were just as likely to be supplied with periodical essays. Jonathan Swift, somewhat dubiously, claimed that copies of *The Spectator* were seldom seen outside of a coffeehouse.[15] Essay projects like *The Spectator* did however outwardly resemble newsprint and shared the same typographical design. Like newspapers, each instalment of *The Spectator* was published as a single folio half-

[9] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, p. 228. [10] Ibid., p. 222.
[11] L.E. Klein, 'The figure of France: the politics of sociability in England, 1660–1715', *Yale French Studies*, 92 (1997), 34.
[12] J. Addison, *Tatler*, no. 155 (6 April 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 2, p. 373.
[13] J. Raymond, 'Introduction: The origins of popular print culture' in Raymond (ed.), *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 10.
[14] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), *s.v.* 'coffeehouse'.
[15] J. Swift, *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. H. Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963–4), vol. 1, p. 259.

sheet, printed in double columns on both sides, with a dateline and, in the top right corner, an issue number.[16] Periodical essays also tapped into the rhythms of the news press and, for ease of distribution beyond London, generally appeared on the postal days of Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Discursive forms of polite entertainment and instruction they may have been, but *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* depended upon the diurnal revolutions of the kinds of newsprint that they ultimately aimed to subsume into their own more refined fabric.

The regular pulse of periodic publication enabled readers of these essays to come into routine contact with their editorial personae, and, through the printing of correspondence, to converse or appear to converse with fellow readers.[17] *The Spectator* itself was the product of an exclusive membership club: home to the Whig oligarchy in waiting, the Kit-Cat Club created a very specific milieu in which the paper's authors were writing and thinking. 'Here', as David Solkin has noted, 'the politics of Whiggery and the culture of politeness merged most comprehensively and effectively into a single, indivisible force.'[18] Despite these exclusive origins, *The Spectator* sustained the appearance that anyone who could buy or gain access to an issue could enter into the conversations and debates staged in its pages, and so become active participants in the sociable and clubbable world of the essay, even if only virtually. The conversations taking place within physical coffeehouses and clubs created a dialogue that may have started within the confines of four walls but swiftly spread through the medium of periodical publication, connecting different social spaces and allowing geographically disparate readers to communicate with one another. 'Equality is the Life of Conversation', wrote Steele,

> and he is as much out who assumes to himself any Part above another, as he who considers himself below the rest of the Society. Familiarity in Inferiors is Sauciness; in Superiors, Condescension; neither of which are to have Being among Companions, the very Word implying that they are to be equal. When therefore we have abstracted the Company from all Considerations of their Quality or Fortune, it will immediately appear, that to make it happy and polite, there must nothing be started which shall discover that our Thoughts run upon any such Distinctions. Hence it will arise, that

[16] R.S. King, 'The *Gazette*, the *Tatler*, and the making of the periodical essay: form and genre in eighteenth-century news', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 114:1 (2020), 48.
[17] On this topic, see J.R. Wood's 'Essayistic personae and personhood' in this volume (Ch. 10).
[18] D.H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 28.

> Benevolence must become the Rule of Society, and he that is most obliging must be most diverting.[19]

In pursuit of the conversable style, the essays privileged an agreeable exchange that excluded 'indecent License', especially punning and *double entendre*, that might have prohibited female participation.[20] From the very beginning, *The Tatler* was quite clear about its address to women, including several papers from Mrs Distaff calling for the admission of women into the world of learning. The conversable world was figured as being governed by the need to admit a certain kind of regulated female participation. The polite essay's conversable form enabled 'a sort of discursive, dialogic "heteroglot" textual community', a society of the text or even a 'portable coffeehouse'.[21] The business of the essay was framed as facilitating polite conversation, with Mr Spectator notably praising coffeehouses as places where 'Men who have Business or good Sense in their Faces' go 'either to transact Affairs or enjoy Conversation'.[22] The coffeehouse (and the essay as its prosthetic extension) became a gateway through which readers could enter into new sociable worlds before exiting its walls and printed pages to practise their values outside.[23]

The association of the periodical essay with the sociable club did not originate with *The Tatler*. John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* (1690–7), for instance, invited its readers to send in questions to the Athenian Club for discussion.[24] The reading public willingly obliged and turned querist in the hope of seeing their own speculations appear in print.[25] Dunton's model was adapted by Daniel Defoe in *The Review* (1704–13), prompting Dunton to

[19] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 225 (16 September 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 3, p. 174.

[20] R. Steele, *Spectator*, no. 155 (28 August 1711) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 2, p. 107. For a discussion of the attitude to punning in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, see Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, pp. 51–3.

[21] A.J. Wallbank, *Dialogue, Didacticism and the Genres of Dispute: Literary Dialogues in the Age of Revolution* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), p. 8; J. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 23.

[22] R. Steele, *Spectator*, no. 49 (26 April 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 209–10.

[23] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp. 40–1.

[24] *The Mercury* also anticipated *The Tatler* in its address to female readers. See Clery, *The Feminization Debate*, p. 43.

[25] R.S. King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018). Helen Berry cautions against treating Dunton's periodical as simply a medium 'to bear witness to the coming of Addison and Steele, rather than participating in a wilder version of coffee shop sociability than they espoused' in 'Rethinking politeness in eighteenth-century England: Moll King's coffee house and the significance of "flash talk"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), 66–7.

accuse him of 'Interloping with my *Question-Project*'.[26] Defoe's periodical consisted of an opening essay, a handful of advertisements, and, until the elections of 1705, a more entertaining supplementary section printed under the rubric of 'Mercure Scandale: Or, Advice from the Scandalous Club'.[27] This section promised readers it would affect either 'your Instruction, or your Diversion', according to how they chose to interpret the club's advice. Although it claimed to address the topics that mattered most to its readers and moved beyond the content of the essays to debate divinity, morality, love, drunkenness, and gaming, the club also set out clear rules for the kinds of conversation that it was willing to facilitate.[28] Seeking to 'state facts right' about the state of affairs in England (and, after the Union, Britain), *The Review* sought to correct the 'Absurdities and Contradictions' published by others and similarly censured its correspondents: 'If they come to Banter Religion, Sport with things Sacred, and dip their Pens in Blasphemy, ... Our Scandalous Club is a New Corporation Erected on purpose to make Inquisition of such Matters, and will treat them but scurvily as they deserve.'[29] Compared to the later conversability of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, *The Review* was combative and brusque, more obviously participating in the fractious sociability beyond its pages. Even so, the Scandal Club evolved as a counterweight to *The Review*'s political content, creating lighthearted conversation that was shaped by its correspondents' 'teazing and querulous Epistles'.[30]

While most of *The Review*'s querulous correspondents were anonymous, a third of those who chose to identify themselves gave a coffeehouse as their address. This reinforced the developing link between coffeehouse culture and the social world of the periodical that *The Tatler* picked up and elaborated in its own way: '*All Accounts of* Gallantry, Pleasure, *and* Entertainment, *shall be under the Article of* White's Chocolate-house; Poetry, *under that of* Will's Coffee-house; Learning, *under the title of* Graecian; Foreign *and* Domestic News, *you will have from St* James's Coffee-house; *and what else I have to offer*

[26] J. Dunton, *Dunton's Whipping-Post; or, A Satyr Upon Every Body* (London: B. Bragg, 1706), p. 88.

[27] Defoe dropped 'Mercure Scandale' from the title of the section with effect on 2 May 1704. D. Defoe, *Review*, no. 17 (2 May 1704) in J. McVeagh (ed.), *Defoe's Review, 1704–1713*, 9 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), vol. 1, p. 113.

[28] D. Defoe, 'Supplementary Journal to the Advice from the Scandal. Club; For the Month of September' in McVeagh (ed.), *Defoe's Review*, vol. 1, p. 391.

[29] Robert Harley to the Earl of Godolphin, 9 August 1702, British Library, Add. MS 28055, f.3; Defoe, *Review*, no. 1 (19 February 1704) in McVeagh (ed.), *Defoe's Review*, vol. 1, p. 8.

[30] D. Defoe, 'The Preface' in McVeagh (ed.), *Defoe's Review*, vol. 1, p. 3.

on any other Subject, shall be dated from my own Apartment.'[31] While these 'articles' could be consulted independently, when viewed together in the periodical essay they begin to forge a picture of social life that brought together different spaces and their respective patrons into a single textual plane. Each coffeehouse fed into a wider sociable world and, by centring the issues in these very real places, *The Tatler* created a precedent for sociability that enabled its later issues to exploit the idiosyncratic reputations of London's coffeehouses. For instance, the Whiggish literary establishments at Will's and Button's differed from Garraway's, which was geared for business, while Ozinda's chocolate house was a popular Tory rendezvous and played host to a dining club of which Swift, author of *The Examiner* (1710–14), was a member.[32] These distinctions were fairly widely known and respected, as John Macky observes: 'A *Whig* will no more go to the *Cocoa-Tree* or *Osinda's*, than a *Tory* will be seen at the Coffee-House of St *James's*.'[33]

Nevertheless, as Steele invoked different coffeehouses and used their idiosyncrasies to survey different aspects of London's culture, he also collapsed the distances between them. *The Tatler* placed the coffeehouses side by side almost as though they neighboured each other on a single street. One could read about White's in St James's, about the Grecian in Will's, and so on, making it possible to move imaginatively between establishments to create a single social space, bounded by the printed page, in which different groups could come together and converse publicly. By making the spaces that some of its readers inhabited central to the social world of the essay, periodicalists introduced a heightened sense of interpersonal exchange as though authors and their readers were all present in the same room.[34] Eidolons such as Mr Spectator could be easily imagined seated alongside readers in the coffeehouse, gathering information for their next paper and puncturing 'the ontological bubble to which he had been confined as an essayistic fiction'.[35] As readers could imagine

[31] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 1 (12 April 1709) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 1, p. 16.

[32] B. Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963); J. Macky, *A Journey Through England. In Familiar Letters from a Gentleman Here, to his Friend Abroad* (London: T. Caldecott, 1714), pp. 107–13; and J. Swift, *Journal to Stella: Letters to Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley, 1710–1713*, ed. A. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 417.

[33] Macky, *Journey Through England*, p. 108.

[34] P. Trolander and Z. Tenger, 'Addison and the personality of the critic' in D.J. Newman (ed.), *The Spectator: Emerging Discourses* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 187.

[35] D. Gigante, 'On coffee-houses, smoking, and the English essay tradition' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 151.

bumping into Mr Spectator on the street, in the coffeehouse, or on his way home from an expedition with Sir Roger de Coverley, the gap between readers and essayistic personae was reduced, at least on the plane of print.

Sociable Forms

The essay as developed by Addison and Steele delighted in offering its readers the prospect that they might become its topic at some future point. In *Spectator* no. 46, Addison presents himself as scouting for content in the streets of London: 'When I want Materials for this Paper, it is my Custom to go abroad in quest of Game; and when I meet any proper Subject, I take the first Opportunity of setting down an Hint of it upon Paper.'[36] He proceeds to relate an anecdote stemming from dropping one of his papers at Lloyd's coffeehouse, describing 'a Cluster of People who had found it, and were diverting themselves with it'.[37] He publishes the notes he claimed to have lost, allowing readers to share in the diversion. Readers can imagine themselves as part of the assembled crowds at Lloyd's, but they maintain the benefit of distance by observing the actions of the crowd from the detached perspective of Mr Spectator; the eidolon occupies a complex position at once inside and outside the scene of sociability.

Addison was quite frank about the importance of gratifying a desire in his readers to have a personal relationship with the authors of *The Spectator*:

> I have observed, that a Reader seldom peruses a Book with Pleasure 'till he knows whether the Writer of it be a black or a fair Man, of a mild or cholerick Disposition, Married or a Batchelor, with other Particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right Understanding of an Author. To gratify this Curiosity, which is so natural to a Reader, I design this Paper, and my next, as Prefatory Discourses to my following Writings, and shall give some Account in them of the several persons that are engaged in this Work.[38]

He soon delivered on his promise and introduced readers to the members of his club: Sir Roger de Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport, Captain Sentry, and Will Honeycomb. With members of the imaginary Spectator club hailing from a variety of backgrounds and representing distinctive types of masculinity, *The Spectator* established its credentials as an observer of different

[36] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 46 (23 April 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 195–6.
[37] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 196.
[38] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 1 (1 March 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 2.

aspects of society, infiltrating its various groups, with Mr Spectator himself being 'little suspected of telling any thing that I hear or see'.[39] These intimate relations and the familiar address to the reader became a paradigm for clubbability within the eighteenth-century periodical and established a formula that would be appropriated by future generations of essayists.

Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator* (1744–6) directly acknowledged its relationship to Addison and Steele in this regard:

> I, for my own part, love to get as well acquainted as I can with an Author, before I run the risk of losing my Time in perusing his Work; and as I doubt not but most People are of this way of thinking, I shall, in imitation of my learned Brother of ever precious Memory, give some Account of what I am, and those concerned with me in this Undertaking.'[40]

Introducing the background of each club member, as Addison and Steele had done, enabled readers to get to know the fictional personae in a process whereby 'a private ethos of friendship could become a public discourse of sociability'.[41] This translation of private bonds into public fraternities is aptly demonstrated in *The Spectator* through the unlikely relationship between the merchant Sir Andrew and the Tory squire Sir Roger:

> my Friends Sir Roger De Coverley and Sir Andrew Freeport are of different Principles, the first of them inclined to the *landed* and the other to the *monyed* Interest. This Humour is so moderate in each of them, that it proceeds no farther than to an agreeable Raillery, which very often diverts the rest of the Club.[42]

Their political antagonism cedes to something more amicable, pointing to the eighteenth-century ideal of social spaces in which ideological differences could be put to one side. Such emergent sociability, however, required membership in an actual club or paid subscription to *The Spectator*. After all, clubs and assemblies, two of the places highlighted in the tenth issue as part of the periodical's democratising agenda, were often accessible to members only or allowed admittance for a far from nominal price. The tendency to gather in exclusive groups, Addison suggests in *Spectator* no. 9, is part of human nature: 'we take all Occasions and Pretences of forming our selves into those little Nocturnal Assemblies, which are commonly known by

[39] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 12 (14 March 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 53.
[40] E. Haywood, *The Female Spectator*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London: T. Gardner, 1748), vol. 1, p. 1.
[41] S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 98.
[42] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 126 (25 July 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 2, p. 3.

the Name of *Clubs*' in which men who hold similar beliefs 'establish themselves into a kind of Fraternity, and meet once or twice a Week'.[43] Addison's famous description of his ambition 'to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses' situated his discourse in opposition to the unworldly wrangling of scholasticism, the inaccessibility of the court, and the pedantry of the universities, on the one hand, but also against what seemed a potentially limitless proliferation of print culture on the other.[44]

One of the watchwords of the project of Addison and Steele was 'simplicity'. Steele framed *The Tatler* in terms of its desire to halt the 'Decay of Conversation' and his periodical was founded amid the expectation that 'we should rise in our Publick Diversions, and Manner of enjoying Life, in Proportion to our Advancement in Glory and Power'.[45] British global power as Steele construed it was to justify the national character – its 'free, brisk, and lively air', as one conduct book put it – in contrast to the formality of Frenchified manners and the ceremony of the court of Louis XIV.[46] Against the emulation of French courtly culture, Addison and Steele presented conversation as a discourse that took place across a horizontal plane of equality where the participants were united by a set of norms. In defining and creating the conditions in which companionable conversation might flourish, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* understood the participation of women – in certain contexts – to further facilitate a moderation of male behaviour. From early on in *The Tatler*, Steele's writing valorised the domestic world as one of many overlapping spheres of sociability in commercial culture:

> To manage well a great Family, is as worthy an Instance of Capacity, as to execute a great Employment; and for the Generality, as Women perform the considerable Part of their Duties, as well as Men do theirs; so in their common Behaviour, those of ordinary Genius are not more trivial than the common Rate of Men; and in my Opinion, the playing of a Fan is every whit as good an Entertainment as the beating of a Snuff-box.[47]

Nevertheless, the primary version of literary sociability imagined by Addison and Steele was polite exchange between like-minded gentlemen:

[43] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 9 (10 March 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 39.
[44] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 44.
[45] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 12 (7 May 1709) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 1, p. 104.
[46] Klein, 'Figure of France', 37.
[47] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 172 (16 May 1710) in Bond (ed.), *The Tatler*, vol. 2, pp. 444–5.

> the Mind never unbends it self so agreeably as in the Conversation of a well chosen Friend. There is indeed no Blessing of Life that is in any way comparable to the Enjoyment of a discreet and virtuous Friend. It eases and unloads the Mind, clears and improves the Understanding, engenders Thoughts and Knowledge, animates Virtue and good Resolutions, sooths and allays the Passions, and finds Employment for most of the vacant Hours of Life.[48]

For all the opening out to the world promised in his writing, Addison's preference for 'Intimacy with a particular Person' over 'a more general Conversation' intimates an exclusionary aspect to *The Spectator*'s idea of conversation.[49] If general conversation is a virtuous activity, it is less attractive than the kind of talk that preselects its company and so ensures a closer form of communion.

A tension between an egalitarian invitation to participation deemed intrinsic to the conversable world and the exclusive aspect of club life was a defining feature of eighteenth-century sociability. Habermas made the equable world of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* central to his idea of the eighteenth-century public sphere as a place where raillery and querulousness were put aside in the name of rational exchange. However much this idea distorts the reality of the period's clubs and coffeehouses – where dishes of coffee could be thrown as well as politely sipped – there is no doubt that it very quickly had a real and durable influence on both the practice of literary sociability, including the roles of women in Bluestocking circles, and the development of the essay as a form throughout the eighteenth century.

Sociable Afterlives

Addison and Steele provided a powerful model of literary sociability for the rest of the century and beyond. As early as 1710, a Gentlemen's Society, which still exists today, was instituted in the Lincolnshire town of Spalding to encourage the local literati to read *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in a conversable environment.[50] By the later eighteenth century, the society was regularly cited as an example of the self-reproducing power of the Addisonian model.[51] In the 1750s, *The Connoisseur* (1754–6), its essays presided over by the eidolon of Mr Town, identified itself with a circle of wits at

[48] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 93 (16 June 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 397.
[49] Ibid. [50] Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp. 78–9.
[51] See D.F. Wood, '"Supporting mutual benevolence": libraries, civic benefaction and the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, 1709–1755' in J. Mee and M. Sangster (eds.), *Institutions of Literature, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 45.

the Bedford Coffee House after the manner of *The Spectator*.[52] In the circles associated with the Bluestocking phenomenon of educated women like Elizabeth Montagu, who presided over a self-consciously literary salon from the mid-century, there was an aspiration towards literary and social forms that aimed for Addison and Steele's 'polite accommodation of political and religious difference through conversation'.[53]

Nowhere was this generative power more apparent than in Scotland, where David Hume's 'Of Essay-Writing' described 'women of Sense and Education (for to such alone I address myself)' as 'the Sovereigns of the Empire of Conversation'.[54] When Robert Burns declared that 'my knowledge of modern manners, and of literature and criticism, I got from the Spectator', he was placing himself in the same trajectory of a long arc of essayistic sociability.[55] In her classic account of the Scottish Enlightenment, Gladys Bryson defines the chief insight of Hume and his fellow Scots as their perception of man as a social being. They explored sympathy as a foundational human attribute to assuage the fear that social coherence might be sacrificed to commercial culture. Subsequent scholarship has demonstrated how often this emergent cultural formation acknowledged an Addisonian model. Nicholas Phillipson points out that 'in Edinburgh the *Tatler* and *Spectator* were reprinted as soon as they had appeared in London, and were discussed and imitated by city wits in magazines like *The Tatler of the North*'.[56] Hume's own essays, the product of this clubbable world, often refer to *The Spectator*, but tend to open up more space for what he called 'disputation', if 'never of animosity'.[57]

James Boswell – an ardent admirer of Addison's standards, whose early trips to London often involved trying to think himself into Mr Spectator's place (without too much success) – certainly thought his compatriots, including Hume, failed to live up to English standards of politeness: 'They would abolish all respect due to rank and external circumstances, and they would

[52] Ellis, *The Coffee House*, p. 156.
[53] E. Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation, 1712–1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 184.
[54] D. Hume, 'Of essay-writing' in *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, 1741–2), vol. 2, p. 5.
[55] R. Burns to Dr J. Moore, August 1787, in G.R. Roy (ed.), *The Letters of Robert Burns*, Vol. 1: *1780–1789*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 138.
[56] G. Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945); and N. Phillipson, 'Politics, politeness and the anglicisation of early eighteenth-century Scottish culture' in R.A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286–1815* (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1987), p. 235.
[57] D. Hume, *Four Dissertations* (London: A. Millar, 1757), p. ii.

live like a kind of literary barbarians [*sic*]. For my own share, I own I would rather want their instructive conversation than be hurt by their rudeness.'[58] Whatever Boswell's reservations, the idea of the little group or coterie, the club of like-minded friends whose intimacy offers a guarantee of select conversation rather than the rough and tumble of theological and political controversy, became an important part of the Scottish appropriation of *The Spectator*. Henry Mackenzie explicitly developed an Addisonian politeness in his essays for *The Mirror* (1779–80) and *The Lounger* (1785–6), both of which grew directly out of literary clubs in Edinburgh with those names. Admiring commentators in both England and Scotland saw the figure of the Lounger as continuous with Mr Spectator, being a man who 'conversed with men of the world, and drew from life'.[59] Their praise echoed the standard account – drawn from *The Spectator* – of periodical essayists as 'the daily visitants of the parlour, not the seldom consulted oracles of the library'.[60]

The assumption that tied the essay to forms of sociability (and their reform) was still firmly in place in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Periodicals continued to index their style to forms of sociability derived from Addison and Steele, who were by now freighted with a canonical authority. When Leigh Hunt launched *The Examiner* in 1808, he framed his enterprise in terms of 'literary conversation' defined by an Addisonian assumption that situated the conversable world beyond party politics and 'the disturbers of coffee-houses'.[61] An updated version of the familiar Spectatorial position is agreeably but firmly in place. 'On Periodical Essays' explicitly committed Hunt to the 'ease and gentility' and the 'graceful familiarity' of Addison. Not that his predecessor escapes censure: 'I must not forget his occasional incorrectness of language and his want of depth, when he attempted to display the critic.' Hunt's desire was to create a more informal style of address to his reader that implied a more heartfelt exchange between friends: 'I wish to make an acquaintance with him, and I know that it is not customary on your first introduction to a person to tell him how you mean to enchant him in your future connexion.'[62]

Where the essay now differs from those precursors, Hunt claims, is in putting aside the disguises adopted by Addison and Steele to appear before the public in the author's own personality: 'We have avoided the trouble of

[58] J. Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal, 1762–1763*, ed. F.A. Pottle (London: W. Heinemann, 1950), p. 300.
[59] From an anonymous review of *The Lounger* in *The Scots Magazine*, 49 (July 1787), 342.
[60] Ibid. [61] L. Hunt, 'PROSPECTUS', *Examiner*, 1 (3 January 1808), 6–7.
[62] L. Hunt, 'On periodical essays', *Examiner*, 2 (10 January 1808), 26.

adding assumed characters to our real ones; and shall talk, just as we think, walk, and take dinner, in our own proper persons.'[63] Even more committed to candour was Hunt's collaborator William Hazlitt. His contributions to the shared 'Round Table' series in *The Examiner* were more abrasive in their reservations about the Addisonian model of conversability:

> Its smooth, equable uniformity, and want of sharpness and spirit, arose from his not having familiarised his ear to the sound of his own voice, or at least only among friends and admirers, where there was but little collision, dramatic fluctuation, or sudden contrariety of opinion to provoke animated discussion, and give birth to different intonations and lively transitions of speech.[64]

The sudden changes of direction – the relish for pugilism in prose as in sport – that are so characteristic of Hazlitt are found wanting in Addison's essays.

Hostile reviewers rarely attended very closely to the differences between Hunt and Hazlitt, but they were certain that neither could pretend to Addison's mastery of the essay. Where the Tory *Quarterly Review* saw Addison as a master of 'ease and softness' and 'cheerful benevolence', a sanctified member of the literary greats of the past century, it dismissed *The Round Table* collaboration as an uneasy blend of 'vulgar descriptions, silly paradoxes, flat truisms, misty sophistry, broken English, ill humour and rancorous abuse'.[65] A decade later, writing in the guise of Harry Honeycomb, an obvious reference to Will Honeycomb from the cast of *The Spectator*, Hunt mourns the passing 'of all the old coffee-houses and the wits'.[66] He depicts a culture withdrawn from the social world of coffeehouse and club: 'People confine themselves too much to their pews and boxes. In former times there was a more humane openness of intercourse.'[67] If there is nostalgia here, it soon emerges that Hunt himself feels more comfortable in a more partitioned social world: 'I confess, if I were a wit, I would rather have a room to myself and friends. I should like to be public only in my books'; Addison and Steele are presented as the architects of their own downfall, 'ruin[ing] their own pipes and wine' by encouraging 'a greater taste for literature and domesticity'.[68] Far from a straightforward eclipse of

[63] L. Hunt, 'Round Table no. 1', *Examiner*, 366 (1 January 1815), 11–12.
[64] W. Hazlitt, 'On the prose style of poets' in P.P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), vol. 12, p. 6.
[65] Anonymous review of *The Round Table* in *Quarterly Review*, 17 (April 1817), 155.
[66] L. Hunt, 'Coffee-houses and smoking', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16 (January 1826), 51.
[67] Ibid. [68] Ibid., 53.

coffeehouse sociability, though, Hunt sees the conversation of culture as reformulating itself in places like the 'Dog and Coal-hole' and 'Dolly's Beef-steak House', with their booths and other forms of segregation suitable for private acts of reading. The nexus that bound sociability to the essay had loosened, and what had for a long time seemed inevitably sealed together came apart as the essay's generic development carried on along its own distinctive and individualised path.

12

Loose Sallies of the Mind: Distraction and the Essay

NATALIE M. PHILLIPS AND SYDNEY LOGSDON

In 1580, Michel de Montaigne described the essay as the perfect literary form for the rambling mind: 'a field . . . wherein so long as there is either ink or paper . . . I may incessantly wander and fly without encumbrance'.[1] This illusion of spontaneous impression relied on a specific pose: the distracted, wandering-minded author. Montaigne implies that the ideal persona for the essayist is that of a writer prone to rambling, fashioning his work around an inborn restlessness:

> Even from mine infancy, I had either folly or quick-silver in my feet . . . so much stirring and natural inconstancy have I in them . . . [that] I wot not which of the two I can more hardly stay at one instant, either my mind or my body. I must like that preacher well, that can tie mine attention to a whole sermon. In places . . . where I have seen ladies hold their eyes so steady, I could never so hold out, but some part of mine would ever be gadding.[2]

Montaigne adopts the pose of a man whose mind (and body) endlessly stirs; unable to be tied down, he is eternally 'quick-silver' and 'gadding'. His *Essais* transform mind-wandering into both the genre's defining trait and its catalyst: 'Were my mind settled', he announces, 'I would not essay, but resolve my self.'[3]

Although he advertises his own distraction, Montaigne never seems particularly worried about readers' attention – perhaps because he is not relying on the purchasing power of his audience – producing essays unbroken by

[1] M. Montaigne, 'Of vanitie' in *The Essayes, or Morall, Politike, and Militarie Discourses*, trans. J. Florio, 3rd ed. (London: R. Royston, 1632), p. 531; we have modernised text of this edition for ease of reading.

[2] M. Montaigne, 'Of experience' in *The Essayes*, trans. Florio, p. 624.

[3] M. Montaigne, 'Of repenting' in *The Essayes*, trans. Florio, p. 451; K. Murphy discusses this same quotation in 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' in this volume (Ch. 2).

paragraphs that sometimes extend over 100 pages.[4] The eighteenth-century periodical essay, by contrast, circulated unbound in a saturated print culture amid audiences increasingly recognised to be cognitively overtaxed. More and more, engaging distracted readers was viewed as inherent to the craft. Early writers like Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and Richard Blackmore began to embed the conceit of distraction in their essays by way of swift, satiric references to inattention: light mockeries of the sleeping churchgoer, references to the peripatetic rambler lost in thought, wry comments on the danger of assuming extended public attention in the serial form. At mid-century, Samuel Johnson explicitly claimed distraction as the central trait of his essayistic personae, capitalising on the power of diversion to attract readers with waning attention spans. Despite their seeming indulgence of distraction, however, his moral essays expound traditional religious views of attention, advising strict focus, discouraging diversion, and teaching readers to economise their waning powers of focus. Only in the Romantic period do writers like Leigh Hunt and Charles Lamb reclaim Montaigne's legacy of celebrating the role of distraction in essay writing and reading. In this context, distracted minds – particularly those that tend to wander with and beyond one's feet – become an emblem of the spontaneous essayistic style and of readerly engagement. This chapter traces the history of the essay against the backdrop of changing models of attention, particularly those for managing an unfocused readership, in the long eighteenth century.

The Transformation of Distraction

In the Enlightenment, a focused readership could no longer be assumed. The ever-expanding population of urban centres, particularly London, following the plague and the Great Fire of 1666, led to a crowding of the urban scene, where a diverse barrage of screaming vendors, street noise, and popular entertainments created a cacophony of diversions. This conjunction of auditory stimuli, alongside the saturation of the eighteenth-century print marketplace, prompted Jonathan Swift to joke that information overload would render his works outdated before the year was out. Readers looking for his poems would find that booksellers had just sent them 'with a Load of

[4] For more on Montaigne's disregard for information overload, see A.M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 49.

Books, / Last Monday to the pastry-cooks', their pages ripped out and recycled to wrap baked goods.[5]

The eighteenth century also saw the rise of what we now think of as noise pollution, accompanied by its class-inflected architectural remedy, soundproofing.[6] William Hogarth's etching and engraving *The Enraged Musician* (1741) captures the chaotic soundscape of eighteenth-century London as well as its perceived power to upset – and reshape – the Enlightenment mind. Hogarth's upper-class musician, high in his brick-gated house, finds his classical music practice interrupted by the surge of sounds outdoors. Opening his window, he is greeted by a symphony of intermixed noise: the squeal of an oboe, a bawling ballad singer, drums, barking dogs, the pump and grind of sharpening knives, a distant horn, hissing cats, and the sound of a boy pissing below (Fig. 12.1).

Such complaints over social, physical, and cognitive crowding reflected a deeper anxiety about the blurring of aristocratic boundaries in city space. As Matthew Bramble, Tobias Smollett's misanthropic character in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), notes, people are 'every where rambling, riding, rolling, rushing, justling, mixing, bouncing, cracking, and crashing in one vile ferment . . . All is tumult and hurry.' Yet what bothers him is not merely the throng of people; it is that the 'different departments of life are jumbled together' – the stone or brick 'hod-carrier, the low mechanic, the tapster, the publican, the shop-keeper, the pettifogger, the citizen, and courtier, all tread upon the kibes of one another'.[7] Complaints about distraction render socio-political and urban unrest as undesirable cognitive motion; the city and its inhabitants experience a collective 'disorder of the brain, that will not suffer them to be at rest'.[8]

Amid what the poet William King called this 'hideous Din', the question emerged: how could one sustain attention to a single object, be it a novel, an essay, a piece of classical music, or even a conversation on the street?[9] While in 1694 Addison could write of Milton that 'ev'ry verse . . . my whole

[5] J. Swift, 'Verses on the death of Dr. Swift' in R.A. Greenberg and W.B. Piper (eds.), *The Writings of Jonathan Swift: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), pp. 550–62.

[6] E. Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise, and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 16.

[7] T. Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: W. Johnston & B. Collins, 1771), vol. 1, p. 186.

[8] Ibid.

[9] W. King, *The Art of Cookery; in Imitation of Horace's Art of Poetry* (London: B. Lintott, 1708), p. 100.

Figure 12.1. William Hogarth, *The Enraged Musician*, 1741. Etching and engraving on paper image, 33.2 × 40.5 cm. V&A Images, London/ Art Resource, New York.

attention draws',[10] by 1782 William Cowper resignedly declared such 'habits of close attention . . . more rare'.[11] In this eighteenth-century context, definitions of what the terms attention and distraction even meant were evolving, diverging, and competing. Enlightenment concepts involving these two states of mind, always intertwined, were in a state of particular flux as terms like 'focus', 'concentration', and 'absorption', originally associated with science and mathematics, all began to take on new cognitive meanings.[12]

In this historical moment, two paradigms of attention collided, with powerful impact on the genre Montaigne had claimed as a space to

[10] J. Addison, 'An account of the greatest English poets' in *The Annual Miscellany, for the year 1694, being the Fourth Part of Miscellany Poems* (London: J. Tonson, 1694), pp. 321–2.
[11] W. Cowper, 'Retirement' in *Poems* (London: J. Johnson, 1782), pp. 258–98.
[12] P.M. Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 28.

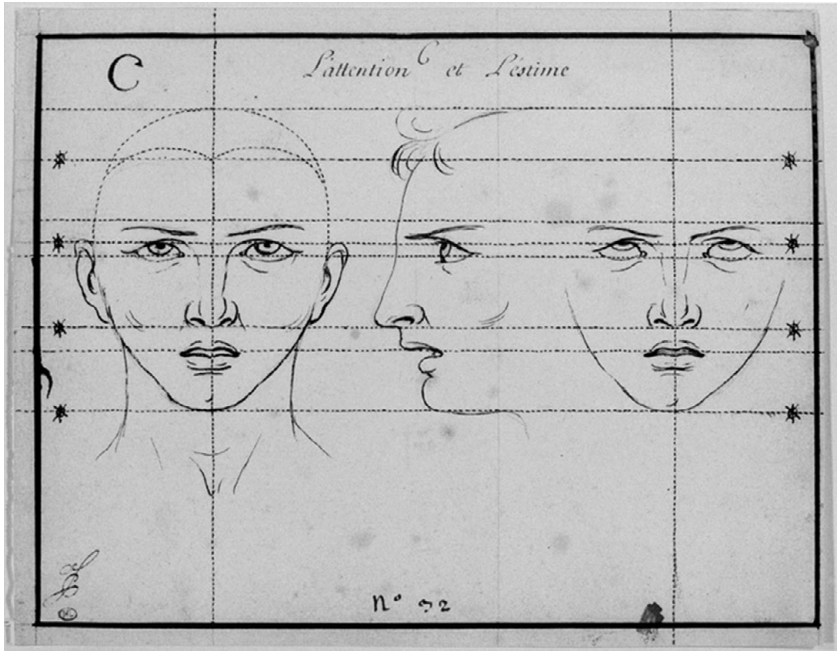

Figure 12.2. Charles Le Brun, 'L'Attention et L'Estime', 1668. Pen, black ink, and black chalk on white paper, 20.7 × 25.9 cm.
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'wander . . . without encumbrance'. The older model of devotional attention cast focus as an inherent virtue, and distraction as sin. Thus, 1 Corinthians urged a singular focus on the divine: 'And this I speak for your own profit . . . that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.'[13] From a biblical, religious perspective, strict attention to one thing at a time was a moral act of mind. Attention, from the Latin *ad-tendere*, 'to stretch toward', was imagined as a fine, taut beam stretching between eye and object. Charles Le Brun, in his *Treatise on Understanding the Expression of the Passions* (1668), later translated from the French by John Williams, visualises this linear view of attention, recommending that painters illustrate focus by having the eyes locked on an imaginary object just outside our view (Fig. 12.2).

At this point in the history of distraction, one did not yet 'pay' attention, but 'fixed' or 'bent' it. If attention connoted an active, single-minded reach of

[13] 1 Corinthians 7:35 (KJV).

thought, distraction (from *dis-trahere*, 'to pull or drag apart') evoked a mind drawn off-path, or dangerously divided to the point of madness. Such definitions extended throughout the eighteenth century, a busy commercial period rife with traditional condemnations of the wandering mind. Yet the Enlightenment is also where we see a second model of attention take hold, with the term 'distraction' being used to describe cognitive drift as part of everyday fluctuations of attention. In this secular paradigm, distraction was redefined as a normal part of mental life.

As early as 1641, René Descartes declared in *Meditations on First Philosophy* that his mind 'enjoys wandering off and will not ... submit to being restrained'.[14] Still more tolerant views of mind-wandering grew in tandem with the mid-century revival of Epicurean theories that described thought in constant motion, making it hard to imagine fixing one's thought on a single idea or task for long. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), John Locke declares that 'the Mind employs itself about [its ideas] with several degrees of Attention. It moves through a great variety of degrees ... between earnest Study and very near minding nothing at all.'[15] David Hume took this idea further in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40). As he put it, 'The thought has evidently a very irregular motion in running along its objects, [and] may leap from the heavens to the earth ... without any certain method or order.'[16] In this modern paradigm, attention was reimagined as a cognitive tempo, shifting and changing to allow each person to focus on the right thing at the right time.

Distraction, rather than an immoral wandering off-path, or a dangerous splitting of the mind that risked madness, was reconceived as a syncopated offbeat to attention's rhythm. It was in this context that Denis Diderot radically reconceptualised distraction as a positive quality of mind: 'Distraction has its source in an excellent quality of mind, an extreme facility in allowing ideas to strike against, or reawaken one another. It is the opposite of that stupor which rests on the same idea.'[17] Diderot's *Encyclopédie* elevates

[14] R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* in J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988–91), vol. 2, p. 21.

[15] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 227–8.

[16] D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 92.

[17] 'La distraction a sa source dans une excellente qualité de l'entendement, une extrême facilité dans les idées de se réveiller les unes les autres. C'est l'opposé de la stupidité, qui reste sur une même idée.' D. Diderot and J. le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné*

the wandering mind for its spontaneity and associative power, which allows unexpected thoughts to strike against one another and create new lines of thinking. Rather than praising strict focus, Diderot denigrated linear attention as single-minded, an attentive 'stupor' that risked recycling the same idea over and over.

Rambling in the Essay

The periodical essay was at the centre of these historical debates about how much (or how little) to govern the undirected mind. In his 1728 *Cyclopaedia*, Ephraim Chambers praised the informal essay's style for its ability to model natural digressions of thought, written 'much ... in the Manner a Man thinks; sometimes leaving the Subject, and then returning again, as the Thoughts happen to arise in the Mind'.[18] Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) likewise defined the essay as a genre of wandering: 'ESSAY: a loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece'.[19] Building on Montaigne, the essay is fashioned as an ideal space for unfinished mental excursion and irregular thought, defined by its ability to evoke the erratic, unorganised motions of a distracted writer's mind.

Despite – or perhaps because of – the growing availability of reading material at this time, readers' ability to focus on such material was considered increasingly taxed. In the revised *Dunciad* of 1729, Alexander Pope described the 'Invention of Print as a scourge for the Sins of the learned'.[20] He presents an apocalyptic world where 'Paper [has] become so cheap, and printers so numerous, that a deluge of Authors cover[s] the land.'[21] London – and its readers' attention spans – was drowning under a tidal wave of print. Periodical writers expressed a strong awareness of readers' vulnerability to distraction. In Addison and Steele's famous essay series on wit, the Spectator nervously announces his plan to extend his topic beyond that day's pages: 'I intend to lay aside a whole Week for this Undertaking, that the Scheme of

des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens (Paris: Briasson, 1751–72), *s.v.* 'Distraction'.

[18] E. Chambers, *Cyclopaedia; or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London: D. Midwinter, 1728), vol. 1, *s.v.* 'Essay'.

[19] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), vol. 1, *s.v.* 'Essay'.

[20] A. Pope, *The Dunciad: With Notes Variorum, and the Prolegomena of Scriblerus* (London: L. Gilliver, 1729), p. 40.

[21] A. Pope, 'Martinus Scriblerus, of the poem' in J. Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 344.

my Thoughts may not be broken and interrupted; and I dare promise my self, if my Readers will give me a Week's Attention, that this great City will be very much changed for the better by next *Saturday* Night.'[22] A *Spectator* paper was short enough to fit a folio half-sheet, approximately 12¼ inches high and 8 inches wide. Yet 'a week's attention' was a radical 'if' for the eighteenth-century essayist.

Essayists began to experiment, carefully, with including references to distraction, acknowledging the potential for wandering minds in both writers and audiences. The Spectator devotes a full essay to advertising the rough, incoherent-seeming beginnings of his essays, describing his disorganised writing notes:

> When I want Materials for this Paper, it is my Custom to go abroad in quest of Game; and when I meet any proper Subject, I take the first Opportunity of setting down an Hint of it upon Paper. . . . By this Means I frequently carry about me a whole Sheet full of Hints, that would look like a Rhapsody of Nonsense to any Body but myself: There is nothing in them but Obscurity and Confusion, Raving and Inconstancy. In short, they are my Speculations in the first Principles, that (like the World in its Chaos) are void of all Light, Distinction and Order.[23]

Here, the chaos and disorder of early essay writing is still restricted to the drafting process, only serving to highlight the relative organisation and careful prosody of the final piece. In *The Lay-Monk* (1713–14), Sir Richard Blackmore offered a precedent for Johnson's *Rambler* persona, using the term to describe an absent-minded character whose mind wanders with his feet. This man 'is not only a frequent *Rambler* abroad, but is very apt to slip away from us in his thoughts, while he is sitting among us . . . [a trait] that looks like Forgetfulness, yet only proceeds from *Inattention or Impatience of thinking long in a Train*'.[24] At this point in the essay tradition, these sporadic appearances and satiric dismissals are short, mocking references to the kind of distracted readers that essay writers increasingly feared would be greeting their prose.

By the 1750s, Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler* were creating essay personae defined by their distraction, using the conceit of mind-wandering

[22] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 58 (7 May 1711) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 1, p. 245.
[23] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 46 (23 April 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, pp. 195–6.
[24] B. Blackmore, *The Lay-Monastery, Consisting of Essays, Discourses, etc. Publish'd singly under the Title of The Lay-Monk* (London: S. Keimer, 1714), p. 126; emphasis added.

to attract an audience overloaded by the glutted London print market.[25] Johnson's Rambler seizes upon essay writing because he has difficulty focusing his attention on – and organising – a longer work. 'After a short effort of meditation by which nothing was determined', he explains in *Rambler* no. 134, 'my ideas wandered ... and I rather wished to think, than thought, upon any settled subject; till at last I was awakened ... by a summons from the press.'[26] Unable to consistently focus, he can only be roused by necessity, an immediate demand for words on the page. The Idler works through a different set of problems with distraction – here, an inability to stay on task – through a second idiom that drew on idleness's historical associations with acedia (the sin of being 'without care') and its connections to sloth. According to one conceit about his lack of drive, 'if his *Title*' (that is, the Idler) 'had required any search, he never would have found it'.[27]

Johnson also populates his essays with distracted fictional readers. *Rambler* no. 191 offers a figure of youthful inattention in Bellaria, a young woman 'four days confined to [her] chamber by a cold'. This illness has not only kept her from 'three plays, nine sales, five shows, ... six card-tables, and ... seventeen visits',[28] but also forced upon her Johnson's essays:

> My aunt has just brought me a bundle of your papers for my amusement. She says, you are a philosopher, and will teach me to moderate my desires, and look upon the world with indifference. ... I have been forced, however, to sit this morning a whole quarter of an hour with your paper before my face; but just as my aunt came in, Phyllida had brought me a letter from Mr Trip, which I put within the leaves, and read about absence and inconsolableness, and ardour, and irresistible passion, and eternal constancy, while my aunt imagined, that I was puzzling myself with your philosophy.[29]

Incorporating Bellaria (and other distracted characters) into his essays, Johnson translates the century's popular ideas about attention into a powerful essayistic strategy by crafting personae with whom modern readers could identify. More than simply satirise diversion, these characters tapped a rising set of theories that explicitly connected pathos, attention, and narcissism.

[25] For more on Johnson and the overcrowded print marketplace, see D. Gigante's account in Ch. 15 of this volume ('On books: the bibliographical essay').
[26] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 134 (29 June 1751) in *The Rambler*, 6 vols. (London: J. Payne & J. Bouquet, 1752), vol. 4, p. 300.
[27] S. Johnson, *Idler*, no. 1 (15 April 1758) in *The Idler*, 2 vols. (London: J. Newbery, 1761), vol. 1, p. 2.
[28] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 191 (14 January 1752) in *The Rambler*, vol. 6, p. 144.
[29] Ibid., pp. 145–6.

Hugh Blair put it succinctly: 'Whenever you bring forth what a man feels to touch his own character . . . you are sure of interesting him.'[30] The formal experiments of *The Rambler* and *Idler*, and their central moral-aesthetic challenge, was to develop a set of rhetorical tools and characters that could simultaneously lure diverted readers to their pages and teach them to maintain attention and piety.

Distraction, to Johnson, was never a virtue; it was merely a tool to train the focus needed to come before God. As early as his eighth paper, the Rambler drops the conceit of distraction, labelling it a 'disease of the soul'.[31] By *Rambler* no. 25, the avoidance of mental and moral wandering has become the proper goal of all mankind: 'To walk with circumspection and steadiness in the right path', he urges, 'at an equal distance between the extremes of error, ought to be the constant endeavour of every reasonable being.'[32] His essays were written 'in hopes that some may be awakened' to eternal 'caution and vigilance' against distraction.[33] Not only is right attention directed, linear, and concentrated on God; in Johnson, it is also incessant.

As a Christian, Johnson believed it was his – and humankind's – duty to keep the mind focused on God; as a modern author, however, he refused to assume that his readers would or could do so. Instead, he sought to cultivate a model of selective attention, whereby readers could develop their powers of focus in short bursts of well-selected concentration based on value. In Johnson's eighteenth-century economy of reading and attention, authors are the producers on the supply side, while readers provide the consumption or demand. But the main units of exchange were not money or books, but attention and time. These, he argued, were intrinsically limited goods – scarce and thus increasingly dear resources when set against the surplus of objects competing to claim them. In the face of this book-attention imbalance, Johnson abandoned the conventional strategy of telling readers to read more or to try harder. He instead revived the classical meaning of reading as *legere* or *lectus* ('to gather, pick out, or choose') as an act of *selective* concentration.[34]

[30] H. Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 3 vols. (Dublin: Whitestone, Colles, Burnet, Moncrieffe, et al., 1783), vol. 2, p. 304.
[31] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 8 (14 April 1750) in *The Rambler*, vol. 1, p. 66.
[32] S. Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 25 (12 June 1750) in *The Rambler*, vol. 1, pp. 216–17.
[33] Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 8 (14 April 1750) in *The Rambler*, vol. 1, p. 66.
[34] Under 'To read' Johnson cites Isaac Watts: 'If we have not leisure to read over the book itself regularly, then by the titles of the chapters we may be directed to peruse several sections.' S. Johnson, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, *s.v.* 'To read'.

The short essay emerged as the best space for developing such skills of selective attention.[35] The Rambler, Johnson emphasised, would publish only 'a short essay on Tuesday and Saturday' and declared that if his essays were not 'commended for [their] beauty', he would be 'at least pardoned for their brevity'.[36] Such comments on shortness drew on a rising commonplace of eighteenth-century rhetoric: forecasting the end of an essay was imagined to hold readers' attention. In his *A Treatise on Education* (1743), James Barclay described this end-in-sight principle in terms of schoolchildren who know that recess is coming. 'The promise of an hour's play', he writes, 'attracts the most wandering attention. With a view to such rewards they often prepare in one hour, what they have slept over more than three.'[37] Remarking on an essay's shortness similarly let audiences know that they only needed to focus a little longer. As Blair explains, cuing an end gives 'the audience the opportunity of knowing ... when they are to be released from the fatigue of attention, and thereby make[s] them follow the Speaker more patiently'.[38] Well-advertised brevity vivifies focus, and the ability to see the end of an essay became a powerful, tangible motive for finishing.

Thinking of such restless readers, Johnson complicated Pope and Swift's Scribblerian model of attention to books – sink or swim, read or do not read – to articulate a model for which focus is less like a flood and more like a financial account in which attention is selectively paid and allocated to multiple objects. In fact, Johnson's structuring metaphor for reading is an *economy of attention*. His financial language of the getting and spending of focus provides a literary-historical antecedent to economically tinged phrases we use today, such as 'to pay attention'. It also prefigures our modern definition of psychological 'problems' of focus such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Johnson used the short periodical essay at a meta-level to teach readers how to employ selectivity. He believed that if both readers and authors could facilitate this highly economised, selective mode of reading (a version of today's quick-gathering style of information mining), audiences might be able to navigate this deluge of print without drowning.

To get readers to economise their attention – or, as his *Dictionary* put it, 'lay [it] out to the greatest advantage' and not 'suffer [it] to run waste' – Johnson first had to convince readers their focus was a limited resource

[35] For further discussion of attention and the essay, see E. Tippin's account in Ch. 33 of this volume ('The short essay in context, 1870–1920').
[36] Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 1 (20 March 1750) in *The Rambler*, vol. 1, p. 7.
[37] J. Barclay, *A Treatise on Education* (Edinburgh: J. Cochran, 1743), p. 34.
[38] Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, vol. 2, p. 377.

worth saving.[39] He used financial language to get this idea across, and his Rambler and Idler liberally invoke currency metaphors for reading. When he wants to condemn authors who 'fill the world with [unnecessary] Volumes' in *Idler* no. 94, he not only describes their work as 'rubbish'; he also says that it 'add[s] little to the common stock of learning', or gross intellectual product. Even if such works *do* contribute something minor to the general fund, Johnson implies, their value is 'so buried in the mass of notions . . . that, like silver mingled with the ore of lead' it is 'too little to pay for the labour of separation'.[40]

Good writers, conversely, conserved attention through concise writing. The praiseworthy novelists discussed in *Rambler* no. 4 choose good protagonists, 'culling from the mass of mankind those individuals upon whom the attention ought most to be employed' and polishing their writing and their heroes as they would diamonds: 'plac[ing them] . . . to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones'.[41] Johnson, however, acknowledged that such brilliant writers were rare and focused *his* attention on helping readers identify and avoid the worst. In *Idler* no. 36, Johnson teaches readers to identify two species of writer especially prone to wasting attention and time: the excessively prolix type, who 'diffuses every thought through so many diversities of expression' that ideas are 'lost like water in a mist', and the 'ponderous dictator of sentences', whose notions are 'delivered in the lump' and are 'like uncoined bullion, of more weight than use'.[42]

This rising secular model of attention as part of an economy – to be invested with care in order to reap dividends of interest – still relied on a traditional view of focus as virtuous. However, the cultural shift from thinking of attention as something to be 'fixed' or 'bent' on an object to imagining it as something inherently divisible, or 'paid' to various accounts also made room for the appreciation of distraction as a part of an economy of reading. Yet again, acknowledging the inevitability of mind-wandering amid cognitive overload was still a far cry from finding value in, or even celebrating, distraction. As Diderot's association of distraction with creativity gained popularity towards the turn of the century, Romantic essayists turned away from economic models of attention to reclaim Montaigne's distracted aesthetic as crucial to the essay form, linking wandering minds to creative spontaneity.

[39] Johnson, *Dictionary*, vol. 1, *s.v.* 'Economy'.
[40] Johnson, *Idler*, no. 94 (2 February 1760) in *The Idler*, vol. 2, p. 235.
[41] Johnson, *Rambler*, no. 4 (31 March 1750) in *The Rambler*, vol. 1, p. 31
[42] Johnson, *Idler*, no. 36 (23 December 1758) in *The Idler*, vol. 1, p. 202.

Distraction in the Romantic Essay

Before he became an essayist, Charles Lamb worked as an accountant with the South Sea Company, a joint-stock company best known for its infamous financial crash of 1720. Subsequent experience through the British East India Company with market instability gave Lamb reason to be suspect of an economy of attention in which readers could expect to reap dividends based on careful investments of interest. In his essay 'The South-Sea House', Elia (his best-known essayistic persona) wanders the now empty 'house of trade', once home to a 'throng of merchants' who orchestrated the eighteenth-century Ponzi scheme, a catastrophically failed attempt to cash in on the slave trade that lured people to invest in a self-inflated market bubble.[43] The practical result of economically motivated attention is crystallised in the abandoned building Elia describes, with its numerous account books: 'great dead tomes' so large that 'scarce three degenerate clerks of the present day could lift [them] from their enshrining shelves'.[44]

Lamb's depiction of the moribund company reaches a satiric peak in the figure of John Tipp, the clerical embodiment of economically minded focus, for whom 'The whole duty of man consisted in writing off dividend warrants.'[45] Regimented habits have left Tipp dangerously unable to experience the pleasures of distraction, and he emerges as a parody of strict linear attention: 'His actions seemed ruled with a ruler. His pen was not less erring than his heart.'[46] Later, in 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster', Lamb offers a satire of strict reading habits and rigid curriculums that bar the mind from diversions and eccentric pleasures. In a moment meant to be tongue-in-cheek, he declares his 'reading has been lamentably desultory and immethodical', such that 'odd, out of the way, old English plays, and treatises [supply] me with most of my notions, and ways of feeling'.[47] Such habits were instead to be celebrated as the ideal source of the Elian essay's personal touch.

Lamb's viewpoint reflects a growing disillusionment with metaphors of attention as 'paid'. For the Romantic essayists, an openness to distraction was central not only to the essay's form, but also to the act of writing. Thomas De Quincey proudly declared that his 'way of writing is rather to think aloud, and follow my own humours', refusing to follow any set plan or to adjust his

[43] C. Lamb, 'The South-Sea House' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 1.
[44] Ibid., p. 3. [45] Ibid., p. 5. [46] Ibid., p. 6.
[47] C. Lamb, 'The old and the new schoolmaster' in Lucas (ed.), *The Works*, vol. 2, p. 56.

thoughts to fit audience expectations.[48] In his essay 'My Books', Leigh Hunt placed instants of distraction at the centre of the creative process, suggesting that the best setting for writing is a study crammed with books, potentially half-open in a state of creative clutter, with a window open:

> I dislike a grand library . . . with books all in Museum order . . . . I [look] sideways at my Spenser, my Theocritus, and my Arabian Nights; then above them at my Italian Poets; then behind me at my Dryden and Pope, my Romances and my Boccaccio; then on my left side at my Chaucer, who lay [open on my] writing desk.[49]

Here, distraction's productivity lay in having something sidelong in the mind's eye. An unfocused mind allowed for layers of cognition, including a primary line of attention and a secondary thread of distraction. For Hunt, essay writing meant permitting the frisson between different objects of attention to spark a multiplicity of thought.

This essayist even carried books, which he described as the ultimate prophylactic for boredom, with him to read while walking:

> I read incessantly when I am not writing, or when I have no companion. I read at breakfast. I read in my walks. I read at dinner, after dinner, after tea, after supper. I stick my book up against the loaf, or a salad-bowl, by my plate. I am armed with a book in my pocket against all emergencies. If I come to a dull street, or a dreary piece of road, I take it out, and instead of the street or road, I walk through the Vale of Tempe.[50]

Whereas seventeenth- and eighteenth-century conduct books decried the impoliteness of walking and reading, Hunt suggests that such multi-tasking is both easy and desirable. Rather than being driven to madness by being split between tasks, Hunt *needed* additional tasks of attention to keep his quick mind from boredom. Each new idea from his reading added another layer of thought and imagery to the environment he was traversing. His ability to wander into such multi-tiered descriptions of thought illustrates the capacity of the mind to accommodate layered cognition in a variety of environments and contexts, marking it the newfound sign of cognitive liveliness and brilliance.

In 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', Lamb extends the value of diversion from author to audience, claiming the pleasures of distracted

[48] T. De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater' in D. Masson (ed.), *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 14 vols. (London: A. & C. Black, 1897), vol. 3, pp. 413–14.
[49] L. Hunt, *Indicator*, 77 (5 July 1823) in D. Gigante (ed.), *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 286, 277.
[50] L. Hunt, 'Men and books', *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 37 (January 1833), 53.

reading as part of its essential value. 'There is a class of street-readers', he writes, 'who, not having wherewithal to buy or hire a book, filch a little learning at the open stalls.'[51] This street reading in bits and parts, always half-distracted by a suspicious bookseller, parallels the pleasures of essay reading. The key is not simply the stolenness of these broken moments of reading, but the mode of divided, partial attention they require, as such readers 'ventur[e] tenderly, page after page'.[52] Reliable moral instruction or philosophy at the tea table is here exchanged for a hopscotch style of distracted, yet provocative and ultimately creative reading. Where Johnson's Rambler sought to teach readers to fix – or at the very least economise – attention in reading, mining the oversaturated print marketplace for gems of moral and intellectual worth, Elia embraced the possibilities of distraction. For the latter, intellectual pleasures lay as much in the lighter mode of mind and reading it invited as in the serious textual substance in which he so often found inspiration.

Elia tells the story of a man who loses his sight: 'Poor Tobin, who latterly fell blind, did not regret it so much for the weightier kinds of reading – the Paradise Lost, or Comus, he could have *read* to him – but he missed the pleasure of skimming over with his own eye a magazine, or a light pamphlet.'[53] He suggests that the blind Tobin does not miss the substance, or content, of literature, so much as the freedom of non-linear, selective reading enabled by the media in which essays were published. 'Much depends', Lamb believed, not just on *what* essay you read, but on '*when* and *where* you read [it]' – conditions to which we might add 'how'.[54]

Conclusion

If Enlightenment essays were devoted to lengthening (and redirecting) limited attention spans, Romantic writers reclaimed the essay as a filler of easily lost fragments of time: 'In the five or six impatient minutes, before the dinner is quite ready', says Elia, 'who would think of taking up the Fairy Queen for a stop-gap, or a volume of Bishop Andrewes' sermons?' Milton 'almost requires a solemn service of music to be played before you enter upon him'.[55] Yet the essay, in counterpoint, can be read quickly and impatiently. Its shortness allowed readers to wander in it – and to take it in at a quick glance. The history of distraction, then, is intrinsically intertwined with

[51] C. Lamb, 'Detached thoughts on books and reading' in Lucas (ed.), *The Works*, vol. 2, p. 200.
[52] Ibid. [53] Ibid., p. 199. [54] Ibid., p. 198. [55] Ibid.

the essay genre. As theories of attention evolved, so too did the form of the essay and the liberties with digression that authors felt at liberty to take.

Today, when readers' attention spans are assumed to be under an increased load from modern technology, no contemporary essay writer – be it the author of a piece for *The New York Times*, a blog, a podcast, or a Twitter (now X) feed – can avoid shaping their work around the expectation of distracted readers, employing stylistic devices to continually hook audiences. Where Johnson proclaimed the shortness of his essays, online links to essays now advertise the brief time (2 min., 5 min.) audiences will take to finish. Rather than satirising inattentive readers who find it difficult to reach the end of an essay, we now assume that attention is partial, something that needs to be managed by the author rather than the reader. These choices in turn shape our habits of focus. If literary genres, as Clifford Geertz suggests, 'generate and regenerate the very subjectivity they pretend only to display', then the essay's changing expectations of distraction have no small impact on our styles of attention. [56]

[56] C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 451.

13

The Essay and the Rise of the Novel

JENNY DAVIDSON

Many different stories can be told about how the essay expanded the possibilities available to writers of prose fiction over the course of the eighteenth century in Britain. One tracks how novelists adopt and adapt the periodical essay's sociable first-person voice, a coherent and sustained editorial intelligence that impresses itself ever more fully on the reader as the numbers of the periodical appear at intervals. Addressed to a moderately large audience – its size akin to the customer base of a particular coffeehouse, or to the larger category of those who frequent coffeehouses – the eighteenth-century essay periodical was at once public and intimate. It provided a model of voice not just in first-person and epistolary fictions but also, increasingly, for third-person narration by authorial personae who took on properties of the eidolons, or speaking personae, of the periodical essay. The personality of such fictional narrators emerged, like that of the periodical essayist, not in a single surge of revelation but by way of repeated exchanges with an audience both notional and real. The experience of duration – an awareness of the time it takes a typical reader to make their way through a novel – became increasingly central to novel-reading over the course of the eighteenth century, and the model of the periodical essay expanded novelists' awareness of the temporal dimensions of storytelling.

In its awareness of the rhetorical and commercial possibilities in a narratorial consciousness, the periodical essay influenced a whole range of narratorial voices and organisational techniques available to authors of fiction. Among them was the first-person narration of characters like Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe, whose voices come alive on the page with the immediacy associated with the essay form from Montaigne onwards, as well as with the editorial personae who manage anthologies of fictional letters by multiple authors, as in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747–8). To these we might add the elaboration by Henry Fielding of the periodical essayist's authorial persona into a far-ranging and powerful

third-person omniscient narrator in *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749) as well as the strangely public intimacy Laurence Sterne's narrator Tristram Shandy creates with his readership by way of both his form of address and his doling out of the story in separately published instalments.

Both the novel and the periodical essay develop in conversation with a host of other genres, and the essay cannot be asked to account for all the experimentation in voice and narration that is such a distinctive feature of eighteenth-century British prose fiction. But the emotional richness of novels like *Tom Jones* and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67) cannot be explained without reference to the model of intimacy that grows over time between Mr Spectator and his readers. Wayne Booth points out with regard to *Tom Jones* that 'if we read straight through all of the seemingly gratuitous appearances by the narrator, leaving out the story of Tom, we discover a running account of growing intimacy between the narrator and the reader, an account with a kind of plot of its own and a separate denouement'.[1] That model is available partly because Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, and their contemporaries refined the self-orientation of the modern consciousness by purging the first-person voice of the qualities of madness and excess that troubled Scriblerian writers like Jonathan Swift so profoundly. The periodical essayists infused their own speakers with the qualities of modesty and politeness associated with contemporary civic and commercial Britain. This chapter will explore some of the consequences of that cultural reformulation for fictional storytelling through the rest of the eighteenth century.

Voice on the Page

The phrase 'the rise of the novel' originates in Ian Watt's 1957 book of that name, which considers the evolution of new narrative strategies and voices in prose fiction over the course of the long eighteenth century. It is a story of rupture and of innovation in which Watt presents the 'emergence' of the novel with unabashedly teleological emphasis. We are pointed towards the fiction of Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, George Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, writers whose commitment to fusing interior consciousness and a vividly rendered exterior physical world depended on their eighteenth-century forebears' embrace of what Watt calls *formal realism*. Watt postulates

[1] W.C. Booth, 'Telling as showing: dramatized narrators, reliable and unreliable' in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 216.

that the 'basically realistic intentions' of early novelists like Defoe and Richardson 'required something very different from the accepted modes of literary prose'.[2] Less likely than their seventeenth-century predecessors to have had a classical education, these writers rejected the elaborate and often somewhat abstracted storytelling modes associated with later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century romance for a colloquial idiom that prioritises 'immediacy and closeness' in describing ordinary lived reality. In Watt's account, writers like Fielding and Sterne kick back against this journalistic or reportorial impulse by adopting hyper-self-aware authorial personae who never let readers forget that the story they are consuming is highly mediated. Watt argues that these two competing traditions find an ultimately harmonious reconciliation in Jane Austen's novels, which pair realistic particularity with a sorting and organising narratorial-editorial intelligence uniquely equipped to capture the subtlety and sublimity of human life.

The novel shares with scientific empiricism a commitment to observation and description, but the centrality of *voice* to its operations invites us to look to the prose essay for another key model. The vividness of representation associated with the essay – one of the key features it shares with the novel – comes by way of its precise rendering not of objects but of the self, that is, the consciousness of the essayist in the form of style. The realism Watt admires in Austen and in certain other nineteenth-century novelists might be reframed, in light of this observation, as a realism not of things but of voice. In this sense, the great twentieth-century essayist-novelists like Rebecca West and James Baldwin reveal themselves as descendants of Austen as well as William Hazlitt, just as autofiction (Hervé Guibert, Rachel Cusk, Karl Ove Knausgaard) is profoundly indebted to the essay as routed through Marcel Proust.

It is not that earlier authors had not created narrators who sounded like real people. The frame narrator of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* sounds like a person, and so does the narrator of Augustine's *Confessions* – a historical person telling the story of his own life. But the narrator of *Tom Jones* or of *Tristram Shandy* sounds *like a person who is also an author*. This is also true, if less obtrusively so, of Austen's narrators, a trend especially pronounced in her unpublished juvenilia (e.g., the 'History of England') and in the proposal scenes of her novels, where a narratorial presence expands to block the reader's view and give privacy to a loving couple at the moment when their

[2] I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 29–31.

closeness grows beyond what can be decorously represented on the page.[3] It is this aspect of the fictional narrator that is so strongly indebted to the periodical essay.

In the introduction to their 2020 edited collection, *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present*, Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy observe that the 'eighteenth-century novels, like essays, are miscellaneous, and incorporate various discourses into a single intelligible whole, making connections between specialised thought and the ordinary, social world'.[4] The novelist in this period was not just a storyteller, like Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but a professional, an author of printed books – one whose self-confidence always invites the charge of egotism. I am reminded of an aperçu in Michael McKeon's dialectical account of the origins of the English novel, an account built around the 1740s contestations between Richardson and Fielding over what the novel was and could be. If Richardson initially seems to cast his lot with historicity (the intense particularity with which Pamela renders the materiality of her world and thereby asserts its realness) and Fielding with subjectivity (the dazzlingly self-aware narratorial voice), the clarity of that opposition is undermined by Fielding's narrators' insistence on the historicity of their accounts and Richardson's prioritisation of the expression of the self in language over other elements of storytelling. If we attend properly to this chiasmus, McKeon points out, we see that 'the exhaustiveness of [Pamela]'s reflections is justified not by the fact that she really made them, but because they are her very own'.[5] The seventeenth-century essay claims authority on the basis of personal experience and by way of the filtering intelligence of the essayist.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the novel – by arrogating the authority of experience to itself – takes over some of the essay's territory. The virtues of the essay would go on to become so thoroughly naturalised in the novel that when Theodor Adorno wants to recover prestige for the philosophical essay from the disparagement of professional philosophers, he bolsters the authority of the essay by piggybacking it on the novel. That means invoking Proust as a crucial forebear: 'It would not have occurred to

[3] On intrusive narration in Austen's proposal scenes, see J. Davidson, *Reading Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 113–17.

[4] T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 22.

[5] M. McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 414.

anyone to dismiss what such a man of experience had to say as insignificant, arbitrary, and irrational on the grounds that it was only his own and could not simply be generalised in scientific fashion.'[6]

Fielding's Stagecoach

Fielding's novel *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* offers an illuminating case study of the interrelatedness of essay and novel at mid-century. Fielding was an exceptionally versatile writer who produced extraordinary work across multiple media as well as genres. His earliest writing to garner attention was dramatic satire, plays that adopted some of the stylistic techniques and cultural orientations of the Scriblerians as well as sharing a target – the 'pollitricks' of Prime Minister Robert Walpole – with John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Fielding's political critique on the stage throughout the 1730s hit the government hard enough that it is generally credited as a factor in the passage of the 1737 Licensing Act, which in turn forced Fielding to shut down theatrical operations and move to the medium of print. He published satirical essays in various periodical formats, but the essays of his that are most read today are interspersed throughout – and fully integrated into – the well-received book-length prose fictions of the 1740s.

Like the essay, satire often enacts a parasitic relationship with primary texts, and one of the ways in which Fielding's fiction seems fundamentally aligned with satire lies in the extent to which he refines his narrative style and ethics oppositionally.[7] The early short epistolary fiction *Shamela* (1740) is not just a parody of Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740–1); it allows Fielding to collapse multiple adversaries into a single mammoth complex of self-involvement and opportunism, showing the homology of Pamela's blow-by-blow narration of her own actions with the actor and theatrical impresario Colley Cibber's monstrously self-absorbed *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber* (1740), and with the preacher George Whitfield's forms of enthusiastic self-scrutiny. *Shamela*'s conflation of Cibber's self-involved voice and Pamela's copious and minute particulars allowed Fielding to turn literary critique into broad cultural indictment.

[6] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form' in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, trans. S.W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 8.

[7] For more on satire and the essay, see J. Strachan's account in 'Satire and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 16).

What was it about Cibber's self-presentation that triggered the contempt of Swift, Alexander Pope, Fielding and many others? Well, here is Cibber in his most characteristic vein:

> It often makes me smile, to think how contentedly I have sate myself down, to write my own Life; nay, and with less Concern for what may be said of it, than I should feel, were I to do the same for a deceas'd Acquaintance. This you will easily account for, when you consider, that nothing gives a Coxcomb more Delight, than when you suffer him to talk of himself; which sweet Liberty I here enjoy for a whole Volume together! A Privilege, which neither cou'd be allow'd me, nor wou'd become me to take, in the Company I am generally admitted to; but here, when I have all the Talk to myself, and have no body to interrupt or contradict me, sure, to say whatever I have a mind other People shou'd know of me, is a Pleasure which none but Authors, as vain as myself, can conceive.[8]

Cibber positions himself as someone readers will laugh *with*; but for Fielding, the joke's on Cibber – we are laughing at, not with him as he contorts himself verbally for our amusement.

A full generation younger than Pope (born 1688) and two generations younger than Swift (born 1667), Fielding (born 1707) adopts their quasi-aristocratic class identification, a self-positioning already more wishful than real, even for the older generations. Rejecting the kinds of first-person narration that he associates with women, servants, and people of excessive religiosity, Fielding allows the first-person perspective into his fiction only by way of a largely disembodied authorial persona whose knowledge of people, places, and events is virtually omniscient. This voice finds its fullest expression in *Tom Jones*. The novel's title labels it a history, but Fielding is careful to position history as a classical genre aligned with epic. Like a great epic poem, the novel is divided into eighteen books, and the opening chapter of each book is an essay that reads very much like something from *The Tatler* or *The Spectator*:

> Peradventure there may be no Parts in this prodigious Work which will give the Reader less Pleasure in the perusing, than those which have given the Author the greatest Pains in composing. Among these, probably, may be reckoned those initial Essays which we have prefixed to the historical Matter contained in every Book; and which we have determined to be essentially necessary to this Kind of Writing, of which we have set ourselves at the Head.[9]

[8] C. Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber* (London: Printed by J. Watts for the author, 1740), p. 18.

[9] H. Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749), ed. T. Keymer and A. Wakely (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 186–7.

These essay-chapters, the narrator goes on to say, are here for contrast; they may be soporific, but serious scenes are required 'to contrast and set off the rest', an assertion he grounds by identifying it as 'the true Meaning of a late facetious Writer, who told the Public, that whenever he was dull, they might be assured there was a Design in it'.[10] That writer is Steele (the sentiment is expressed, among other places, in *Tatler* nos. 38 and 234), and Fielding would invoke the same point again in the opening number of his *Covent-Garden Journal* (1752), whose rhetorical positioning closely recalls the essay-chapters of *Tom Jones*.[11]

What kind of history provides the generic model for the novel really matters to Fielding, and the introductory chapter to Book Two takes up that work of definition:

> Tho' we have properly enough entitled this our Work, a History, and not a Life; nor an Apology for a Life, as is more in Fashion; yet we intend in it rather to pursue the Method of those Writers, who profess to disclose the Revolutions of Countries, than to imitate the painful and voluminous Historian, who, to preserve the Regularity of his Series, thinks himself obliged to fill up as much Paper with the Detail of Months and Years in which nothing remarkable happened, as he employs upon those notable Æras when the greatest Scenes have been transacted on the human Stage.[12]

That disparaged 'painful and voluminous Historian' is not just the monkish author of a medieval chronicle but also Fielding's peer and rival, Samuel Richardson. Of course, the material and cultural conditions that enable the success of Richardson's fictions are also those which allow Fielding to thrive as a professional author. It is exactly the proliferation of print and the sheer shameless promiscuity of authorhood that enables his own success as a satirist.[13]

Further evidence that the narrator's rejection of ephemeral print genres is a matter more of form than of substance can be found in a sequel remark in which the narrator bolsters the prestige of selective history (history after the fashion of Thucydides) over that of the voluminous chronicle. He does this by aligning the latter with the 'News-Paper, which consists of just the same Number of Words, whether there be any News in it or not', then offering an

[10] Ibid., pp. 190–1. [11] Ibid., p. 904, n. 9. [12] Ibid., p. 73.

[13] For one of the clearest moments in which the novel's narrator claims the periodical essayists as a precursor, see ibid., p. 428; also, B.S. Hammond, 'The periodical and the polite' in *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670–1740: 'Hackney for Bread'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 145–91.

additional comparison 'to a Stage-Coach, which performs constantly the same Course, empty as well as full'. Yet while stagecoach transit is presented here as pointless and wasteful, it also serves in conclusion as the closest model for the novel itself, at least for how a narrator builds a relationship with readers over time:

> As we have therefore travelled together through so many Pages, let us behave to one another like Fellow-Travellers in a Stage-Coach, who have passed several Days in the Company of each other; and who, notwithstanding any Bickerings or little Animosities which may have occurred on the Road, generally make all up at least, and mount, for the last Time, into their Vehicle with Chearfulness and Good-Humour; since after this one Stage, it may possibly happen to us, as it commonly happens to them, never to meet more.[14]

This vision of a finite and bounded intimacy – a semi-public space, not truly accessible to all but enabling at least provisional community for those who can afford to buy tickets – harks back directly to the voice of Mr Spectator's calling a new kind of readership into being.[15] The conditions of print and distribution that underpin the periodical essay – regular production and publication, real-time consumption, the potential for the author to respond to reader input in later numbers – create a community of readers in a very literal sense.[16] Some of the rhetorical manifestations of those conditions are retained when the numbers are republished in volumes, the format in which they would continue to be read, and can be drawn on by authors of long-form fiction for many of the same rhetorical and cultural ends.

In his own essay on the periodical essayists, Hazlitt calls them 'moral historians', and that mode of moral history was opened up to writers of fiction in the eighteenth century, at least partly by way of Addison and Steele.[17] By mid-century, politeness had come to seem no longer antithetical to but eminently compatible with commerce. The exclusionary and frequently anti-democratic attitudes of Swift and Pope had been supplanted by very general acceptance of the idea that genteel sociability should be

[14] Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 812.

[15] For expansion of this idea, see P. Keen's account in Ch. 14 of this volume ('The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism').

[16] Also on this point, see J.R. Wood's 'Essayistic personae and personhood' and N.M. Phillips and S. Logsdon's 'Loose sallies of the mind: distraction and the essay', both in this volume (Chs. 10 and 12, respectively).

[17] W. Hazlitt, 'On the periodical essayists' in D. Wu, T. Paulin, D. Bromwich, et al. (eds.), *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 9 vols. (London: Routledge, 1999), vol. 5, pp. 84–96.

moderated in and by the marketplace. Fielding abandons any pretence that the modern literary author can exist outside the market. 'An author ought to consider himself, not as a Gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary Treat', proclaims the narrator at the novel's opening, 'but rather as one who keeps a public Ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for their Money.'[18] The novel gets permission from the periodical essay to prioritise building a relationship with a paying readership.

Sterne's 'Vis a Vis'

Whereas the authorial persona who narrates *Tom Jones* retains personal qualities but remains ultimately disembodied, the narrator of Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is Tristram Shandy himself. Tristram is as attentive to particularities of the body as any Robinson Crusoe or Pamela Andrews before him, despite the oddities and anomalies of his own embodiment. Our most vivid sense of Tristram's body may come as he recounts the story of his accidental circumcision; and here as elsewhere, Tristram's strategic teasing omissions are marked on the page by way of asterisks and dashes, typographic analogues of the oratorical trope of aposiopesis, in which a speaker breaks off before completing the sentence.[19]

Consider Uncle Toby's hypothesis about why Mrs Shandy insists on having the local midwife for her impending delivery in preference to a sophisticated and expensive urban man-midwife: 'My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a man come so near her ****.'[20] The missing letters spell A R S E, we conjecture, and after quoting Uncle Toby's observation once more, Tristram reflects on what's left out of his own representation of a conversation at which he cannot possibly have been present: 'Make this dash, – 'tis an Aposiopesis. – Take the dash away, and write Backside, – 'tis Bawdy. – Scratch Backside out, and put *Cover'd-way* in, – 'tis a Metaphor; – and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle *Toby*'s head, that if he had been left to have added one word to the sentence, – that word was it.'[21]

[18] Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 35.

[19] In *Spectator* no. 568, Joseph Addison portrays readers at a coffeehouse analysing the asterisks and dashes in one of his *Spectator* essays. For a reading of this scene, see D. Gigante, 'Pedantry and party politics: essays in the public sphere' in Elizabeth Sauer (ed.), *Emergent Nation: Early Modern British Literature in Transition, 1660–1714*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 19–34.

[20] L. Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. M. New and J. New (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 89–90.

[21] Ibid., p. 90.

The initial strategic omission invites the reader to do the work of filling in the blanks, but the narrator exists to help as well as hinder, and it is the dynamic, interactive quality of the narrator's voice that stands out – a voice that is instantiated typographically in print, a medium that might seem antithetical to speech but that actually equals, and in some respects exceeds it.

The only thing that equips you to be a good reader of *Tristram Shandy* is the experience of reading *Tristram Shandy*, and part of the generic debt to the essay can be seen in the extent to which the great pleasure the novel offers is getting to know its narrator in the play of language on the page. Tristram's story unfolds in chapters and books, his opinions proliferating in a fashion that threatens to displace not just the recounting of incidents but the very living of the life itself. The publication of *Tristram Shandy* in instalments must have compounded its first readers' sense that the story could potentially continue indefinitely, an effect now partially obscured by our experiencing it in the single volume of a modern reader's edition. In his account of Sterne's fiction, Thomas Keymer shows that *Tristram Shandy* achieves its remarkable topicality especially by way of its 'ongoing responsiveness, through the mechanisms of serialisation, to key texts, trends and events'.[22] Publishing the novel in parts allowed each new instalment to respond both to readers' takes on the preceding parts of the story and to salient recent cultural and political developments. Keymer echoes and corroborates Paul Hunter's insight that many of the most popular fictional narratives of this period are continuous and relatively endless rather than structured, bounded, finite.[23] With points of contact between the genre of the novel and various periodical forms 'close and suggestive', Keymer argues that we might think of *Tristram Shandy* 'as an elaborate comic subversion of the Spectatorial project, in which the lucubrations that Addison's urbane persona offers for "the Diversion or Improvement" of his readers give way to the crack-brained efforts of a provincial buffoon "to write my life for the amusement of the world, and my opinions for its instruction"'.[24]

The style of Sterne's posthumously published *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr Yorick* (1768) may owe even more to the eighteenth-century periodical essay than *Tristram Shandy*. In the latter work, the habits of learned satire (the hint of Swift's deranged modern narrator in the *Tale of a Tub*) serve as a counterweight to, and sometimes actively undermine, the urbanity of the authorial Tristram. *A Sentimental Journey*, in

[22] T. Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 6.
[23] Ibid., p. 122. [24] Ibid., p. 133.

contrast, is written in short essayistic sections like Fielding's chapters in *Tom Jones*, and the narratorial voice of Sterne's authorial stand-in (Yorick, a character from *Tristram Shandy*) is particularly reminiscent of a periodical eidolon. Newly arrived in Calais, aware that the continent has no real equivalent of England's stagecoach, the frugal Yorick needs to obtain a chaise for travel. He gravitates immediately to 'an old Desobligeant' – 'so called in France', a note at the foot of the page informs us, 'from its holding but one person'.[25] We are actually with Yorick in that desobligeant as he composes the preface to his journey, the text of which constitutes the next section of the narrative.

Yorick approaches the activity of composition with sufficient energy that the carriage begins to rock back and forth, attracting the interest of two potentially prurient countrymen:

> We are only looking at this chaise, said they – Your most obedient servant, said I skipping out of it, and pulling off my hat – We were wondering, said one of them, who, I found, was an *inquisitive traveler* – what could occasion its motion. – Twas the agitation, said I coolly, of writing a preface – I never heard, said the other, who was a *simple traveler*, of a preface wrote in a *Desobligeant*. – It would have been better, said I, in a *Vis a Vis*.[26]

The set-up for the joke is that their salacious interest reveals only a masturbatory solitary writer, not a fornicating couple – or perhaps their interest is not salacious at all and it is *our* minds that are dirty in finding any of this suggestive. The punchline implies that all writers should write for an audience, with Yorick deprecating as well as defending his own onanistic tendencies. The *Vis a Vis* is a carriage in which two people sit facing one another, and it can be thought of as modelling the space a periodical essayist creates in a single number, with the intimacy between author and addressee potentially growing over time as the numbers accumulate and the journey continues.

Aware of the risk of falling into an arid, infertile, masturbatory mode, Sterne's narrators strive to embrace sociability. Sentiment passes like an electric current from one person to another in a chain of contact that can be easily broken but almost as readily restored by the flow of feeling for and with one's fellow. In the opening sequence, Yorick has broken that

[25] L. Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings*, ed. T. Parnell and I. Jack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7.

[26] Ibid., p. 11. On other types of travellers in the essayistic mode, see B. Schaff's 'A brief history of travel and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 30).

sentimental chain by failing to respond with generosity when a poor monk begs for his charity. But the sight of the monk speaking with a lady gets Yorick's juices flowing again, and when he clasps the lady's hand in his own, that physical connection allows him to feel, and her to feel him feeling: 'The pulsations of the arteries along my fingers pressing across hers, told her what was passing within me.'[27] Still holding the lady's hand, Yorick offers his box of snuff to the monk, and with this new flow of charity comes the idea that Yorick and the lady might travel together in a single chaise. With this goal in view, the two of them tour the host's collection of vehicles, and when Yorick catches sight of 'another old tatter'd *Desobligeant*', he notes that

> notwithstanding it was the exact picture of that which had hit my fancy so much in the coach-yard but an hour before – the very sight of it stirr'd up a disagreeable sensation within me now; and I thought 'twas a churlish beast into whose heart the idea could first enter, to construct such a machine; nor had I much more charity for the man who could think of using it.[28]

Yorick, having opened the door and got into it, asserts that it is too small to hold two people at once, upon which M. Dessein ushers the lady into the carriage and closes the door on the two of them. The onanistic scene of solitary writing and coach-rocking thus gives way to a rather cramped heterosocial intimacy that is rendered sufficiently politely – full of ellipses and innuendo – that Yorick's insinuations remain just safe enough for female readers.

From Montaigne onwards, the essay was associated with experience and intimacy, but both Tristram and Yorick – Sterne's two authorial stand-ins – push the possibility that essayistic intimacy cannot be fostered without tipping over into bodily intimacy. *A Sentimental Journey* flirts constantly with the question *how close is too close?* In the final scene before the manuscript breaks off, Yorick narrates a problem in casuistry that requires determining what will be the most proper way for himself and two women (a mistress and her servant) to share two small beds set closely adjacent to one another in a single small recess. Neither bed is large enough for the two women to lie in together. Ultimately, it is decided that the curtains between the beds will be fastened with pins, that Yorick will wear a nightgown rather than sleeping naked (breeches are deemed an acceptable substitute), and that there will be no conversation (remember that in this period *conversation* can be a euphemism for sex).

[27] Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, p. 16. [28] Ibid., p. 21.

Sleepless after many hours of tossing and turning, Yorick lets loose an exclamation and is immediately charged with having breached the treaty. When he insists that since it is 'an ejaculation' (unidirectional rather than interactive), there is no breach, the dispute heats up, several pins come loose, and an aperture in the curtain begins to open:

> Upon my word and honour, Madame, said I – stretching my arm out of bed, by way of asseveration –
>
> – (I was going to have added, that I would not have trespass'd against the remotest idea of decorum for the world) –
>
> – But the Fille de Chambre hearing there were words between us, and fearing that hostilities would ensue in course, had crept silently out of her closet, and it being totally dark, had stolen so close to our beds, that she had got herself into the narrow passage which separated them, and had advanc'd so far up as to be in a line betwixt her mistress and me –
>
> So that when I stretch'd out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de Chambre's – – – [29]

The withheld word could plausibly be *hand*, and if the reader fills in the gap this way, we keep things clean; really, though, it must be *arse*, the same four-letter word Uncle Toby refrained from uttering as he speculated on the cause of Mrs Shandy's reluctance to employ a man-midwife. Sterne's essayistic narrators insist that sexualised knowledge of bodies is built into the consciousness they share, even if the parts of those bodies cannot be named in print. This fictive mode is continuous with that of the essay, but its investments in sexuality challenge the somewhat neutered masculinity that characterises so many periodical eidolons in the age of *The Spectator*.

Austen and the Wisdom of Prose

I conclude with an often-quoted passage from Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (probably drafted in 1803, but published posthumously in 1818, together with *Persuasion*) that asserts the value of the novel over the essay. To dismiss Frances Burney's *Cecilia* or *Camilla* or Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* as 'only a novel', says the narrator, is preposterous: a novel is after all 'only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in

[29] Ibid., p. 104. Some editions (not this one) insert a dash as per above.

the best chosen language'.[30] This, too, 'while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogised by a thousand pens'.[31] Brean Hammond emphasises the irony of *The Spectator*'s appearance in this passage: 'the publication that played so large a part . . . in the creation of polite literary discourse is condemned by that very form – the novel – that it helped to sponsor'.[32] But the deflections and ironies of Austenian narration invite a more nuanced view. It is not so much that Austen rejects the merits of the periodical essay as that she argues that the novel, not the periodical essay, and certainly not the shopworn selections and abridgements that constitute the literary anthology, has inherited the virtues the periodical essay embodied in its heyday. And despite the fact that the passage invites a reading of essay as gendered male and novel as gendered female, that would be a real misrepresentation of the gendering of these two genres in eighteenth-century Britain.[33]

For both Burney and Austen, Samuel Johnson's moral writings (including but not limited to the essays of *The Rambler* and *The Idler*) were especially influential in terms of modelling a voice and perspective and way of knowing that were available to women contemporaries in ways that neither Fielding's nor Sterne's novels could be. Anne Elliot surely has Johnson in mind when she recommends to the bereaved Captain Benwick, in an important scene in *Persuasion*, that his struggle against grief will benefit by his turning from poetry to prose, 'such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest example of moral and religious

[30] J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, *Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon*, ed. J. Davie and J. Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 24. I have benefited from the reading of this passage in R.S. King's '"[L]et a girl read": periodicals and women's literary canon formation' in J. Batchelor and M.N. Powell (eds.), *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690–1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 221–35.

[31] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 23.

[32] Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England*, p. 236.

[33] In a recent essay that builds on the work of Paula McDowell, Ros Ballaster, and others, Anna K. Sagal demonstrates that women novelists in the period are participating actively as authors as well as readers of periodical essays, with Eliza Haywood and Charlotte Lennox being two of the most prominent examples. See A.K. Sagal, 'Constructing women's history in the *Lady's Museum*' in Batchelor and Powell (eds.), *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain*, pp. 53–66.

endurance'.[34] Letter collections, histories, essays: all of these prose genres, but especially the essay, would continue to feed into the narrative voices and storytelling modes available to writers of fiction in an ongoing cross-pollination, a powerful reminder that literary history and literary criticism benefit from considering the novel alongside other genres. Neglect of the essay and its multiple avenues of influence on prose fiction would result in real distortions and misrepresentations of the history of the novel, some of them courted by nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists who wanted to purge fiction of didacticism.

Indeed, attending to the influence of the periodical essay's authorial personae on fictional narrators helps us understand developments that we might otherwise be tempted to consider sui generis. Much has been said about the neutral or neutered quality of Austen's narratorial voices. 'Of that godlike authority which we think of as the default mode of narration in the traditional novel', writes D.A. Miller in his book on Austen's style, 'Jane Austen may well be the only English example.'[35] Miller asserts that Fielding's and Thackeray's omniscient narrators are

> noisy personalities [who] never let us forget [the] earthly origins [of 'godlike authority'] as a glamorisation of some garden-variety male know-it-all . . . . By contrast, Austen's divinity is free of all accents that might identify it with a socially accredited broker of power/knowledge in the world under narration . . . . Nowhere else in nineteenth-century English narration have the claims of the 'person,' its ideology, been more completely denied.[36]

Without downplaying the force of Miller's perceptive observation, eighteenth-century scholarship might invoke the periodical essay as a key point of origin for third-person omniscient narration, with the neuter quality of Austen's narrators looking less strange and more familiar in light of their debt to the periodical eidolon.

In her book on eighteenth-century periodical eidolons, Manushag Powell addresses the innovation in voice effected by eighteenth-century essayists who 'generate fictional stand-ins with the qualities of an "ideal" professional author, a neutral individual unhampered by allegiance to private concerns'.[37] Why do eidolons never marry, she asks, despite the centrality of the

[34] J. Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 84–5.
[35] D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 31–2.
[36] Ibid., p. 32.
[37] M.N. Powell, *Performing Authorship in Eighteenth-Century English Periodicals* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), p. 4.

bourgeois family unit to the genre? Why, regardless of sex, are the speakers of essays 'almost all superannuated, interested in but separated from their societies, and hoping against hope to find a life through print while weighed down by the knowledge that death comes to all, but ... especially to authors'?[38] Reading the history of the novel in light of the history of the essay, the neuter quality of so many of nineteenth-century fiction's most memorable omniscient narrators – George Eliot and Anthony Trollope as well as Austen – speaks directly to the literary-cultural configurations and stylistic possibilities associated with the early periodical essay.

[38] Ibid., p. 11.

14

The Periodical Essay and the Rise of Literary Professionalism

PAUL KEEN

Joseph Addison's famous boast in *Spectator* no. 10 that 'it is with much Satisfaction that I hear this great City inquiring Day by Day after these my Papers', would reverberate throughout the eighteenth century as a dramatic announcement of the meteoric rise of what had quickly become one of British readers' favourite genres, the periodical essay.[1] That first paragraph in what was still a fledgling periodical just ten issues old is now such an iconic statement, so neatly emblematic of larger tectonic shifts in England's cultural landscape, and so appealingly democratic in its professed urge to update Socrates's effort to bring 'Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men', that it has become easy to read past its many nuances. But no one, then or now, doubted *The Spectator*'s impact.[2] Subsequent decades would see a seemingly endless stream of similar publications, appearing daily (like *The Spectator*), twice weekly (like Johnson's *Rambler*), or sometimes weekly (like *The World* and *The Connoisseur*). However ironic many of these periodicals' characterisations of their periodical personae may have been, their affable humour did nothing to lessen the underlying seriousness with which many of them advocated for the importance of their essays. Mr Spectator's upbeat admission that the news of his periodical's popularity has been a source of 'much Satisfaction' is worth taking seriously in an age when boasting was difficult to square with genteel codes of politeness; but, in some ways, that was precisely the point: periodical essays were to become a crucial discursive space in which the very idea of literary professionalism could be imagined.

Addison's essay proudly quantified its extraordinary popularity with 3,000 copies distributed daily, reaching an estimated 60,000 readers given *The Spectator*'s availability in public locations like the coffeehouses it would often

[1] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in G.G. Smith (ed.), *The Spectator*, 4 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1907), vol. 1, p. 38; hereafter all *Spectator* citations refer to this edition.
[2] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 38–9.

mention by name.[3] He qualified it with a cautionary hope that the edifying influence of these 'morning lectures' would help readers 'distinguish themselves from the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren'.[4] Rearticulating the genteel discourse of politeness in middle-class terms may have meant fortifying rather than abandoning the exclusions on which these new forms of social distinction remained predicated, but the jovial confidence of Addison's bold announcement of this extraordinary success less than two weeks after the appearance of their first number implied a related claim for the legitimacy of professional authors. He may have been careful to distinguish himself and his readers from the 'ignorant and unattentive' masses, yet Mr Spectator's workaday roots were on full display in his unapologetic remark that he had received these circulation numbers from 'my publisher', a sure sign of his immersion in the literary marketplace rather than his distance from it in any carefully sequestered patrician retreat.[5]

It would not have been surprising then, that the 'Disciples' who formed his audience were the citizens of '*London* and *Westminster*', a demographic that could collectively be referred to as 'this great City' with its implications of enormity and energy: the bustle of the modern world.[6] In his *Essay upon Publick Spirit*, which appeared the same year (1711), John Dennis railed against the fact that London had become an 'over-grown Town' whose inhabitants were debauched by 'an Infinity of irregular Desires',[7] but in the world of *The Spectator*, this sense of growth was a sign of social health rather than corruption. This highly urban commercial world was *The Spectator*'s target audience, and Addison's unabashed immersion in it suggested an unprecedented immediacy in the relationship between author and readers: a feedback loop that situated both groups in a highly reciprocal dialectic of mutual interest and support. Energised by the news that 'this great City' had been 'inquiring Day by Day after these my Papers', the essayist recycled that news in a periodical destined to circulate amongst the same readership it referenced.[8]

[3] For more on the essay in its coffeehouse context, see J. Mee and J. Buckley's 'Clubs and coffeehouses: sociability and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 11).
[4] Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in Smith (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 38.
[5] Ibid. [6] Ibid.
[7] J. Dennis, *An Essay upon Publick Spirit: Being a Satyr in Prose upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times, the Chief Sources of our Present Parties and Divisions* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1711), p. 11.
[8] Addison, *Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711) in Smith (ed.), *The Spectator*, vol. 1, p. 38.

Authors by Profession

Like the essay genre itself, which critics routinely date back to Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* (1580) and Francis Bacon's *Essayes* (1597), the idea of an author writing for pay was nothing new. What *was* new was the implication that these authors deserved respect *because of* rather than despite the fact that they were remunerated for their writings. Authors who wrote for a living had long been reviled as the dubious antithesis of real authors, or those reliant on the support of aristocratic patrons and whose writings reflected the elevated nature of their artistic aspirations. Not only were these 'amateur' writers dignified by the reflected gentility of their patrons, but their distance (real or constructed) from the literary marketplace supposedly ensured the integrity of their work in ways that were diametrically opposed to the debased world of Grub Street hacks, squirrelled away in cramped garret apartments, writing on demand for an equally tasteless paying audience.

Addison's unapologetic account of his success helped to change that equation by placing him in a position that would become increasingly important throughout the century: that of a professional author, a hard-working writer for whom payment was a sign of self-respect rather than corruption, and whose freedom from patrician dependence was a guarantee of integrity rather than servility. 'Sense and genius are as proper commodities to traffick in, as courage', the mid-century weekly *Connoisseur* insisted, 'and an Author is no more to be condemned as an hackney scribbler, though he writes at the rate of so much *per* sheet, than a Colonel should be despised as a mercenary and a bravo, for exposing himself to be slashed, struck, and shot at for so much *per* day.'[9] 'The Writer who serves himself and the Public together, has as good a Right to the Product in Money of his Abilities, as the Landholder to his Rent, or the Money-Jobber to his Interest', James Ralph agreed, in his tract *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated* (1758).[10]

A four-part article entitled 'On the History of Authors by Profession' in an Edinburgh weekly, *The Bee* (1791), echoed these arguments by explicitly limiting the focus of its historical survey to those writers who were 'an author by profession', a category that nonetheless included 'the ancient philosophers', who had 'avowedly and regularly [begun] to receive money

[9] G. Colman and B. Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 114 (1 April 1756) in *The Connoisseur. By M. Town, Critic and Censor-General*, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1757–60), vol. 4, p. 77.

[10] J. Ralph, *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated with Regard to Booksellers, the Stage, and the Public. No Matter by Whom* (London: R. Griffiths, 1758), p. 8.

for their public lectures'.[11] It recognised that pointing this out would offend 'the bigoted veneration which surrounds these philosophers'.[12] But, the article insisted, placing 'their condition as authors . . . in its true light' meant 'expos[ing] them in commercial plainness' by acknowledging the economic realities that this idealisation of the ancient authors had obscured.[13] Not only had these 'philosophers' already, even in ancient times, embraced the idea of being paid for their work, *The Bee* suggested, but they welcomed it as a sign of their public relevance and moral worth.[14]

In their more elevated modes, emergent accounts of professionalism were anchored in a discourse of bourgeois humanism – an ideology that grafted the aristocratic rhetoric of civic humanism onto a middle-class spirit of industriousness that recuperated the expectation of payment as a sign of integrity rather than of greed. Having lamented the degree to which the bustling world of commercial modernity had diminished the 'scope for public spirit', the essayist Vicesimus Knox insisted on the need 'to do good in an effectual and extensive manner within the limits of professional influence and by performing the business of a station, whatever it may be, not only with regular fidelity, but with warm and active diligence'.[15] Sceptics would have argued, however, that having replaced his father as headmaster of Tonbridge School the year before, in 1778, Knox was in an exceptionally privileged position that made talk of doing public good possible in a way that was not the case for most authors.

Manufacturers of Literature

Accounts of literary professionalism published in essay periodicals drove an important wedge in the opposition between 'true' writers supported by patrons and the writers for hire of Grub Street, fusing the lofty motivations

[11] J. Anderson, *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer* (Edinburgh: J. Anderson, 1790–4), vol. 1, p. 63 (12 January 1791); and vol. 3, p. 87 (25 May 1791).

[12] Anderson, *The Bee*, vol. 3, p. 54 (18 May 1791).

[13] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 13 (11 May 1791).

[14] This defence of writing for pay was strengthened by the much broader rise of the professional classes charted by historians such as Penelope Corfield, a transformation reinforced by what Marilyn Butler describes as 'the period's massive investment in knowledge' generally. See P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700–1850* (London: Routledge, 1995); and M. Butler, 'Culture's medium: the role of the review' in S. Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 130. See, too, R. Morrison's 'Nineteenth-century reviews reviewed' in this volume (Ch. 24).

[15] V. Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (1779; New York: Garland, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 390–1.

of the former with the commercial realities of the latter. Yet the persuasive force of elevated descriptions of public-minded devotion to the general good were complicated by the problem that they *were* so elevated. As Matthew Sangster points out, the hundreds of letters by struggling authors appealing for financial relief to the Literary Fund established by David Williams in 1790 is a stark reminder that the dream of earning a living by writing, let alone the belief that this could be channelled into a benevolent concern for the public good, remained out of most authors' reach well into the next century, when changing print technologies finally made mass publication affordable.[16] Samuel Johnson had to beg a loan from Samuel Richardson after being arrested for debt in 1756, just one year after finishing his *Dictionary of the English Language*. Six years later, having learned that Oliver Goldsmith was in danger of being arrested for debt, he intervened with a publisher to arrange for the sale of Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* for £60.

Even those who did succeed in making a living, or at least avoiding bankruptcy, could ill afford to devote themselves to so disinterested a calling as cultivating the burgeoning middle class. William Hazlitt reminded his readers in 1820 that 'we have few authors who are not paid by the sheet'.[17] The idea of literary professionalism, if it was to have any serious influence, would need to be framed in terms that more accurately reflected the working realities of authors' lives, although the irrelevance of high-minded evocations of the public good did little to lessen that ideal's rhetorical appeal. Knox may have been determined to ground his call for public service in a clear-eyed recognition of 'the limits of professional influence', acknowledging the fact that outmoded talk of 'moral and political knight-errantry' was as 'ludicrous' in the modern day as 'the extravagancies of chivalry', but the rhetorical crescendo of his exhortation 'to do something in our generation, both for the benefit of contemporaries and of those who are to follow' suggests just how appealing this quixotic urge to align the idea of professionalism with high-minded accounts of public service could be.[18]

Periodical essayists' greatest contribution to these debates may have been their ability to put the self-aggrandising tendency of professional writers in perspective, and in doing so, to forge a vision of literary professionalism that

[16] M. Sangster, *Living as an Author in the Romantic Period* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[17] W. Hazlitt, 'On the difference between writing and speaking' in D. Wu, T. Paulin, D. Bromwich, et al. (eds.), *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 9 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), vol. 8, p. 256.

[18] Knox, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 391.

resolutely acknowledged the less glamorous reality of most authors' working lives. In these accounts, professionalism was more an exit plan from other failed careers than a noble calling driven by philanthropic dedication. George Colman and Bonnell Thornton's *Connoisseur* notes the extent to which overcrowding in 'the three professions ... Law, Physic, or Divinity' had forced many people who would normally aspire to these careers to seek their livelihood in 'other employments; which, though distinct from all three, and not usually dignified with the title of Professions, may fairly be considered in the light'.[19] It then singled out authorship from among the latter, declaring that 'the first of these Professions is an Author. The mart of literature is, indeed, one of the chief resorts of unbeneficed Divines, and Lawyers and Physicians without practice.'[20] In characterisations like this, authorship's status as a profession was invoked as proof not of its growing social distinction but of its status as an escape route from the established professions, an off-ramp when more prestigious but also more demanding occupational goals did not work out. Johnson's *Rambler* agreed that of the 'several thousands' of authors currently living in London, many 'have seldom any claim to the trade of writing, but that they have tried some other without success'.[21]

Far from aspiring to Knox's dream of doing something 'in our generation, both for the benefit of contemporaries and of those who are to follow', Johnson insisted that

> only a very few can be said to produce, or endeavour to produce, new ideas, to extend any principle of science, or gratify the imagination with any uncommon train of images or contexture of events; the rest, however laborious, however arrogant, can only be considered as the drudges of the pen, the manufacturers of literature, who have set up for authours, either with or without a regular initiation, and, like other artificers, have no other care than to deliver their tale of wares at the stated time.[22]

Like Goldsmith's depiction of the cluster of self-involved and opportunistic writers who composed the club of authors in his mid-century periodical essay series, *The Citizen of the World* (1760–1), this image of 'manufacturers' setting themselves up as authors demystified literary professionalism by exposing its

[19] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 116 (15 April 1756) in *The Connoisseur*, vol. 4, pp. 91–2.
[20] Ibid.
[21] S. Johnson, *Rambler* in R. Lynam (ed.), *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, 6 vols. (London: George Cowie, 1825), vol. 2, p. 114 (no. 114, 6 August 1751); hereafter all *Rambler* citations refer to this edition.
[22] Ibid.

fundamentally commercial nature. These writers had no illusions about emulating Addison's dream of bringing philosophy down from the heavens; their goal (which was also the basis of their professional integrity) was to meet their deadlines. Anything beyond this was as out of reach as Knox's talk of 'the extravagancies of chivalry'. In practice, of course, these two levels of motivation were not as mutually exclusive as Johnson's depiction of them suggests, but his point remained an important one. Most writers did not enjoy the luxury of being able to ignore their immediate needs, even if they were inspired by a belief in the potential quality of their work or by a desire to contribute to the larger social good.

For Johnson, this unvarnished sense of authors' working reality ultimately heightened their public worth by reinforcing their relevance to contemporary readers, virtually all of whom led equally busy lives constrained by similar cares and pressures. The son of a bookseller, he was often deeply in debt. Johnson had travelled penniless to London, where he found work writing on demand for Edward Cave's *Gentleman's Magazine*. He learned first-hand both the challenge and the value of succeeding in a world where a person's ability to 'deliver their tale of wares at the stated time' mattered.[23] He had gained a distinguished reputation, if not financial security, by the time he decided to produce *The Rambler* in 1750, but he had not forgotten the value of this unglamorous world of literary labour. People may have once 'imagined', his Rambler claimed, that an author is inspired by some 'peculiar impulse of genius . . . in which his mind is elevated with nobler sentiments, enlightened with clearer views, and invigorated with stronger comprehension'.[24] But if this had ever been the case, it was certainly no longer true of the new generation of London authors for whom the idea of producing work that was inspired by an 'impulse of genius' was a luxury they could ill afford. These modern authors had 'been too long *hackneyed in the ways of men* to indulge the chimerical ambition of immortality'.[25] They were too busy with 'productions' they knew would 'seldom . . . remain in the world longer than a week' to dream of posterity. Their work was motivated by 'the sound of the clock' rather than romantic talk of inspiration and genius.[26]

Ironically, he explained, these sorts of literary labours had a special value precisely because they did *not* aspire to any kind of enduring honours. The authors' daily grind, working to deadlines to pay their bills and put food on the table, meant that they had much in common with modern readers, most of

[23] Ibid. [24] Ibid. [25] Ibid. [26] Ibid., p. 115.

whom lived similar lives. Their limitations were, in this sense, their strength, because they ingratiated them to the common reader and prepared them to produce work whose very ephemerality would 'have uses more adequate to the purposes of common life than more pompous and durable volumes'.[27] Their precarious existence translated into hard-won insight that had more earthly wisdom to convey to the vast majority of their readers than did more abstract moral philosophers or classical historians. Being immersed in 'the ways of men' could make them insightful rather than merely cynical; as Johnson put it,

> if it is necessary for every man to be more acquainted with his contemporaries than with past generations, and to rather know the events which may immediately affect his fortune or quiet, than the revolutions of ancient kingdoms, in which he has neither possessions nor expectations; if it be pleasing to hear of the preferment and dismission of statesmen, the birth of heirs, and the marriages of beauties, the humble authour of journals and gazettes must be considered as a liberal dispenser of beneficial knowledge.[28]

Periodical essayists made up for these depictions of literary drudgery with the exuberant irony with which they parodied delusions of literary grandeur, often via the inflated self-importance of their own hapless periodical personae.

Invoking the notoriously verbose quack advertisements of 'those eminent practitioners in physick, who make their appearance either in hand-bills, or in the weekly or daily papers', in its first number, Edward Moore's 'Adam Fitz-Adam' announced his determination in *The World* to 'introduce my own importance to the public, as near as I can, in the manner and words of those gentlemen; not doubting of the same credit, and the same advantages'.[29] Inspired by his philanthropic commitment to the public good, Fitz-Adam explains that he had

> directed my good friend Mr Dodsley to bind up in three neat pocket volumes the aggregate of these my labours for the years one thousand seven hundred fifty three, and one thousand seven hundred fifty four; and to distribute the said volumes among all the booksellers of this great metropolis, to be sold by them to-morrow and forever at so small a price as three shillings a volume. And I have the pleasure of declaring, with equal truth with the proprietor of the Old Iron Pear-tree Water and its Salts, *that to relieve the* UNHAPPY *is the full end of this publication*.[30]

[27] Ibid. [28] Ibid.
[29] E. Moore, *The World. By Adam Fitz-Adam*, 6 vols. (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1753–7), vol. 1, p. 7 (no. 1, 4 January 1753).
[30] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 92 (no. 115, 13 March 1755).

Debasing Addison's Socratic dream of the extensive circulation of ideas to the triviality of fashionable life, Fitz-Adam proudly acknowledges that his papers travelled through the highest circles of polite society, where they were principally employed to reinforce current fashions. Having revelled (ironically for the reader) in his pride about 'the great good which my labours have done to mankind', he cheerfully and just as ironically shares his certainty that his efforts on behalf of humanity had earned him 'an interment in that honourable place . . . Westminster abbey'.[31]

The Connoisseur's periodical persona, Mr Town, made this joke about authors' weakness for grandiose delusions in terms of an unfortunate encounter with childhood toys. Like Adam Fitz-Adam, he indulges the wish 'that I could accompany my papers, wheresoever they are circulated . . . through all their travels and mutations', in the end to be confronted instead by the sobering vision of children flying paper kites made from his own periodical among other reading matter: 'On one I discovered several pages of a sermon expanded over the surface; on another the wings fluttered with love-songs; and a satire on the ministry furnished another with ballast for the tail. I at length happened to cast my eye on one taller than the rest, and beheld several of my own darling productions pasted over it.'[32] Yet he manages to convert his indignation at becoming 'the play-thing of children . . . into a compliment to my vanity' by equating the spectacle of a kite made up of copies of *The Connoisseur* 'into an allegory for literary fame', as the paper flies above an admiring multitude. Yet Mr Town is mortified by the scene's reminder of the vagaries of modern life when the twine breaks and 'the Kite, together with my airy dreams of immortality, dropt to the ground'.[33]

The sly implication of such humorous accounts of literary professionalism was that the real choice was not between authors whose 'mind[s were] elevated with nobler sentiments' and shabbier 'manufacturers of literature' whose work had a very limited shelf-life, but between those who were honest enough to recognise their lot and those, like the ironised periodical personae (Mr Town, Adam Fitz-Adam), who laboured under misapprehensions about the enduring value of their work. Translating the contrast between lofty ideals and working realities into a distinction between self-

[31] Ibid., vol. 6, p. 309 (no. 209, 30 December 1756).
[32] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 29 (15 August 1754) in *The Connoisseur*, vol. 1, pp. 228–9.
[33] Ibid., p. 230.

awareness and grand ambitions enabled periodical writers to represent the idea of literary professionalism in ways that made a virtue out of authors' realistic expectations in a literary marketplace.

The demise of an essay series frequently offered a rich opportunity to indulge in mock heroic accounts of the death of periodical personae in ways that allowed authors to reinforce the mixture of vanity and opportunism at work in periodical papers. The final three numbers of *The Microcosm* were dedicated to the saga of the periodical persona's untimely demise beginning with a sombre editorial intervention in the thirty-eighth number:

> The Reader may more easily conceive, than I can express, the extreme sorrow with which I inform the Public, of the indispositions under which Mr GRIFFIN now labours. It has been, alas! for some time the opinion of the most able Physicians, that he could not outlive *forty*; – if so, two weeks, 'two little weeks, with wings of down' (as the Poet says) will terminate his existence, as the Guardian, the Censor, and the Instructor of the little World.[34]

The announcement concluded by reminding readers that 'compleat sets of the *Microcosm*, or any single number, may be had as usual of *The Editor*'.[35] *The World* terminated with a similar conceit, recounting the death of Adam Fitz-Adam. 'Before these lines can reach the press, that truly great and amiable gentleman will, in all probability, be no more', an editor declared, explaining that Fitz-Adam had mishandled the one-horse chair he had purchased 'in order to make a genteel figure in the world'.[36] But such was Fitz-Adam's fortitude that he recovered just long enough to ask his publisher to 'set forth my sudden and unhappy end', and reaffirm his hopes of being buried in Westminster Abbey.[37] 'The frontispiece to the WORLD', he suggested, 'if executed at large in virgin marble', would provide a 'suitable monument', perhaps with a picture in the background of 'a one-horse chair in the act of overturning'.[38] An addendum to the final number announced that Mr Fitz-Adam, 'still alive, though in a dangerous way', had 'ordered a general INDEX to the folio volumes to be printed and given GRATIS in a few days at Mr Dodsley's in Pall-Mall, and at M. Cooper's at the Globe in Pater-Noster-Row'.[39] The fact that *The World* did become available as a complete set with a general index suggests not just the multiple formats and modes of cultural authority that

[34] G. Canning, et al., *The Microcosm, A Periodical Work, By Gregory Grifffin, of the College of Eton*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: C. Knight, 1786–7), vol. 2, pp. 207–8 (no. 38, 23 July 1787).
[35] Ibid, p. 208. [36] Moore, *World*, vol. 6, pp. 304–5 (no. 209, 30 December 1756).
[37] Ibid., pp. 306–7. [38] Ibid., p. 309. [39] Ibid., p. 311.

periodicals aspired to (from the topicality and currency of the single numbers to the authority of complete sets bound with all of the usual paratextual additions), but also their capacity to convey different levels of self-irony and self-promotion. These ironic accounts of the foibles of periodical personae were doubled by parodic depictions of modern authors generally, such as the 'little elderly man, with a very serious countenance, and exceedingly foul linen' who imposed himself on *The Microcosm*'s author, Gregory Griffin, explaining 'that he was by profession an Author; [and] that he had been for many years a literary projector'.[40] Having declared his 'firm resolution . . . never to indulge the trivial taste of an ill-judging age, in which it was his misfortune to be born', the literary projector 'at length concluded by drawing out of a tin box some *"proposals for publication"*, which he desired might be communicated to the public through the medium of my paper'.[41] Exposing overblown writerly ambitions as an alibi for incompetence reinforced periodicals' emphasis on embracing their commonality with the working world. More sympathetic accounts focused on the unrealistic burden the fashionable vogue for periodical personae as quasi-celebrities placed on real authors, who could never hope to live up to the hype. 'People who are not apt to write themselves, have a strange curiosity to see a LIVE AUTHOR', *The World* suggested, in a typical sketch of an author's pathetic social performance having been introduced into fashionable society.[42]

It was an unfortunate irony of fashionable life that the public's fascination with authors ran so deeply against the grain of most writers' bookish personality. 'There is no character in human life, which is the subject of more frequent speculation among the vulgar, than an Author', echoed *The Connoisseur* in its own ironic revision of this scenario, which recalled Mr Town's excitement as a young child, having been introduced to a real author:

> I could not help whispering to myself the whole evening, 'I am in company with an Author', and waited with the most anxious impatience to hear him deliver something, that might distinguish him from the rest of mankind. The gentleman behaved with great chearfulness and politeness: but he did not at all answer the idea, which I had conceived of an Author; and I went away exceedingly disappointed, because I could not find any striking difference between him and the rest of my acquaintance.[43]

[40] Canning et al., *Microcosm*, vol. 2, p. 165 (no. 35, 9 July 1787).
[41] Ibid., pp. 165, 168.
[42] Moore, *World*, vol. 3, p. 182 (no. 91, 26 September 1754).
[43] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 114 (1 April 1756) in *The Connoisseur*, vol. 4, pp. 72–3.

These caricatures of literary genius and more sympathetic accounts of writers struggling unsuccessfully to live up to the pressures of unrealistic expectations reminded readers of the larger importance of recognising the value of authorship in ways that remained firmly tethered to the commercial plainness of writers' working lives. This worked both as a salutary reminder of the true modesty of their actual working conditions and, more profoundly, as an insistence on the common ground this created with readers, a shared set of pressures and priorities that resonated with the preoccupations of a modern nation.

The Business of Everyday Life

These accounts of authors' foibles were balanced by periodical writers' frequent suggestion that the daily grind of modern authorship converged with periodicals' famously miscellaneous and digressive nature in uniquely powerful ways, because of the extent to which their 'microcosmopolitan' focus resonated with the bustle and distractions of modern life in a polite commercial nation.[44] 'We, whose business it is to write loose essays, and who never talk above a quarter of an hour together on any one subject, are not expected to enter into philosophical disquisitions, or engage in abstract speculations', *The Connoisseur*'s Mr Town allowed, but what the periodical essayist lost in this disregard for weightier topics, he made up for in his ability to convey 'a knowledge of the world': periodical essays resembled the miscellaneous 'pieces of *Hogarth*', whose work offered 'faithful delineations' of everyday life.[45]

This was especially true, as Henry Mackenzie's Edinburgh weekly *The Lounger* suggested, because periodical essays amounted to 'little records of what I have heard or read, set down without any other arrangement than what the disposition of the time might prompt', or what Johnson, writing in *The Idler*, described as 'diminutive history', writing focused on the quotidian realities of daily life.[46] This swerve towards the particular anticipated Jane Austen's self-effacing reference to 'the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on

[44] Canning et al., *Microcosm*, vol. 1, p. 32 (no. 3, 20 November 1786).

[45] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 136 (2 September 1756) in *The Connoisseur*, vol. 4, pp. 240–1.

[46] H. Mackenzie, *The Lounger. A Periodical Paper, published at Edinburgh, in the Years 1785 and 1786* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1787), p. 4 (no. 1, 5 February 1785); Samuel Johnson, *Idler*, no. 1 (15 April 1758) in Lynam (ed.), *Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 2, p. 391; hereafter all *Idler* citations refer to this edition.

which I work with so fine a brush', but like Austen, it was ultimately less an expression of modesty than a claim to the importance of literature's ability to capture the social and psychological intricacies of modern life.[47] Revelling in the 'ignoble state of a fugitive sheet and a half', *The World* disavowed the weightier imperative of 'moral' topics that would require 'at least a quarto' or 'thick octavo' (expensive formats at the time) in favour of the more prosaic concerns which 'alone must be the object of an humble weekly author of a sheet and a half'.[48] Unlike those more imposing works, Fitz-Adam explained, 'the business of a writer of essays' was 'to mark the passions as they rise, and to treat of those especially, which appear to influence the manners of the age he lives in'.[49] Johnson would have agreed.

This inverse logic that insisted on the supreme importance of the apparently trivial minutiae of everyday life suggested an implicit convergence between the 'humble' or 'diminutive' focus of periodicals and the increasingly private world of commercial modernity in which daily life and manners were of greater importance than larger public events remote from people's everyday lives. 'We shall in general find that the progress of nations in knowledge, but more especially their advancement in literary politeness of manner, will keep pace with the number of periodical publications allowed to circulate, and the freedom of discussion that is tolerated in such publications, when under proper restrictions', a letter to *The Bee* insisted.[50] It was not hard to see how this case for the paradoxical importance of periodical essays, which had become influential precisely because their focus was so apparently modest, translated into a related case for the importance of the people who wrote them. 'The author of a periodical performance has indeed a claim to the attention and regard of his readers, more interesting than that of any other writer', the *Lounger* claimed, because periodicals' serialised format and tendency to focus on everyday subjects enabled them to respond in real time to 'the daily fluctuating circumstances of custom and of fashion'.[51]

This was especially true, *The Bee* suggested, because of the sociability that was widely assumed to be an intrinsic element of periodical writing. If 'mixing with society, on a footing of equality' was the only way 'that

[47] J. Austen [letter to her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, 16 December 1816] in R.W. Chapman (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 469.
[48] Moore, *World*, vol. 4, pp. 54–5 (no. 111, 13 February 1755).
[49] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 259 (no. 136, 7 August 1755).
[50] Anderson, *Bee*, vol. 1, p. 171 (2 February 1791).
[51] Mackenzie, *Lounger*, p. 7 (no. 2, 12 February 1785).

man can learn to rub off those rude inattentions to others, which self love so naturally produces in every individual, when confined to solitude', a purported letter to *The Bee* suggested, then the collaborative style of authorship that was widely associated with the periodical press epitomised this experience:

> it is only when literary men mix with others in a periodical publication, where liberty is permitted to every one to do what he thinks proper, on a footing of perfect equality, that they can properly feel their own weight, and be compelled to relinquish those ungracious self-sufficient tones, which the fancied superiority that every man is disposed to ascribe to himself, before he has experienced the powers of others, so naturally inspires; and to give that becoming modesty in reasoning, which constitutes the highest polish of a literary character.[52]

Whatever dignity this everyday focus may have sacrificed in its implicit assumption about the irrelevance of loftier versions of literary activity focused on higher ideals and disinterested commitment to the public good, it recuperated in both its relevance to the busy quotidian rhythms of modern life and, even more, in this emphasis on the morally improving effects of sociability generally.

The Common Interest of Learning

Whatever Samuel Johnson's reputation as a crotchety Tory known for his 'growling petulance or propensity to contradict', his periodical essays offered the age's most sustained, forward-looking, and deeply empathetic account of literary professionalism fully attuned to the pressures of commercial modernity.[53] Johnson's insistence in *The Idler* on the importance of writing that was 'levelled with the general surface of life' extended well beyond that essay's focus on biography to a much broader vision of literature.[54] Like so many arguments about periodical essays' 'diminutive' character generally, this work of artistic levelling rested on the issue of writing's relevance to the bustle of modern life. Studies of 'great transaction[s]' that 'involve a thousand fortunes in the business of a day . . . afford few lessons applicable to private life, which derives its comforts and its wretchedness from the right or wrong

[52] Anderson, *Bee*, vol. 1, p. 171 (2 February 1791).
[53] M. Wollstonecraft, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. J. Todd and M. Butler, 7 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989), vol. 7, p. 110.
[54] Johnson, *Rambler*, vol. 2, p. 630 (no. 84, 24 November 1759).

management of things which nothing but their frequency makes considerable'.[55] This insistence on the relative importance of 'private life' over 'great transactions' was in many ways a tribute to the importance of people's daily routines, which ought to be valued precisely because they *were* so mundane. The sum total of the minutiae of daily life, a web of incidents too seemingly inconsiderable each in themselves to warrant any real attention, ultimately mattered more, if only because of their sheer frequency, than the impact of great events which, by their nature, were exceptional rather than a standard part of everyday life.

Rejecting definitions of authorship that prized a writer's distance from 'the noise and tumult of vulgar joy' in the name of higher aesthetic or intellectual ideals, Johnson insisted that to 'hover at a distance round the world' was to 'know it only by conjecture and speculation', and, therefore, not really to know it at all.[56] Invoking Bacon as an authority on the value of sociability, Johnson insisted that 'the student must learn by commerce with mankind to reduce his speculations to practice and accommodate his knowledge to the purposes of life'.[57] Rejecting some writers' tendency 'to look on the common business of the world' with 'disdain', he warned against the dangerous temptation of taking refuge in obscurity as a badge of intellectual worth: anyone 'that can only converse upon questions, about which only a small part of mankind has knowledge sufficient to make them curious, must lose his days in unsocial silence, and live in the crowd of life without a companion . . . . No degree of knowledge attainable by man is able to set him above the want of hourly assistance.'[58] Returning to the same theme in an *Idler* essay nearly a decade later, he anticipated Wordsworth's definition of the poet as 'a man speaking to men' by nearly four decades, insisting that 'an authour partakes of the common condition of humanity; he is born and married like another man; he has hopes and fears, expectations and disappointments, griefs and joys, and friends and enemies, like a courtier or a statesman'.[59]

Johnson used his periodical essays to extend these suggestions to broader reflections that sought to map out the rules that ought to regulate the profession of authorship as a working community. The eighteenth century

[55] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 284 (no. 60, 13 October 1750).
[56] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 36 (no. 128, 8 June 1751).
[57] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 75 (no. 137, 9 July 1751).
[58] Ibid., pp. 75–6.
[59] W. Wordsworth, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), vol. 2, p. 393; Johnson, *Idler*, vol. 2, p. 676 (no. 102, 29 March 1760).

saw the beginnings of a shift from the credentials enforced by a much older apprenticeship system towards professions regulated through processes of accreditation, but authorship remained notoriously exempt from this regulatory impulse. Johnson's point was that, in the absence of these more formal credentials, the public's estimation of the worth of particular authors would be heavily influenced by its assumptions about authorship more generally. For Johnson, the fact that the porousness of the literary marketplace (the fact that anyone could become an author without needing any sort of credential) meant that writing could never hope to replicate other professions' restrictions, called for empathy rather than heightened censoriousness. The fact that some authors might be distinguished by more ambitious or rarified forms of literary production should not allow them to 'imagine that another is ill employed, because, for want of fuller knowledge of his business, he is not able to comprehend its dignity'.[60] Ultimately, he warned, 'the common interest of learning requires that her sons should cease from intestine hostilities, and instead of sacrificing each other to malice and contempt, endeavour to avert persecution from the meanest of their fraternity'.[61] Authors' tendency to forget this lesson by allowing 'envy and competition' to divide 'the republick of letters into factions' undermined the public's respect for the profession of authorship – and individual authors – no matter how illustrious.[62]

Literary success was thus a collective rather than an individual possibility, that depended on an enlightened understanding of authors' shared immersion within a professional community: 'Every man ought to endeavour at eminence not by pulling others down, but by raising himself, and enjoy the pleasure of his own superiority, whether imaginary or real, without interrupting others in the same felicity.'[63] Johnson's reflections on literature as a rapidly changing field of cultural production applied to more than just periodical writing, but they epitomised the prominence of periodical essays in efforts to chart a new vision of literary professionalism. Ultimately, they described a vision of modernity whose energy and vagaries were closely aligned with the fundamental qualities of periodical essayism.

[60] Johnson, *Rambler*, vol. 1, p. 42 (no. 9, 17 April 1750).
[61] Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 115–16 (no. 145, 6 August 1751).
[62] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 383 (no. 83, 1 January 1751).
[63] Ibid., vol. 1, p. 42 (no. 9, 17 April 1750).

15

On Books: The Bibliographical Essay

DENISE GIGANTE

Today, we tend to think of bibliography as a technical genre, that is, as the listing of 'works cited' by scholars or the description of books in catalogues by booksellers and librarians. But in its original sense of *writing about books*, bibliography has always sat naturally within the essay tradition. In Britain, the bibliographical essay emerged as a distinct entity in *Philobiblon* (1345), a collection of twenty essays devoted to the appreciation and treatment of books, by Richard de Bury. This medieval bibliophile was writing for a learned audience prior to the emergence of the printed book, which meant writing in Latin for a mainly clerical audience. The revolution in print technology sparked by Johannes Gutenberg two centuries later made books available beyond the walls of the monastery, helping to standardise vernacular traditions throughout Europe, and Michel de Montaigne, writing in Middle French, inaugurated the essayistic branch of modern belles-lettres in his *Essais* (1580). Montaigne wrote his essays surrounded by books in a tower of his castle, where extracts from his reading engraved in black lettering traversed the overhead beams of his library and his bookshelves – and his essays were similarly adorned. What those essays reveal is that making the *attempt* synonymous with the essay involved marshalling all the resources of a mind formed through bookish as well as biographical experience.

In later bibliographical essays like Charles Lamb's 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading' and 'The Two Races of Men' (1820); William Hazlitt's 'On Reading Old Books' (1821) and 'On Reading New Books' (1827); and Leigh Hunt's 'My Books' (1823), 'Men and Books' (1833), 'Old Books and Bookshops' (1837), and 'Bookstalls and "Galateo"' (1847), we find the essayist weaving a semblance of identity from bookish experience. The premise of this chapter is that the essay form was always vitally bound up with books, which served as prompts as well as props for the associative thinking that characterised the genre. 'I cannot sit and think', wrote Lamb in the voice of

Elia (his signature essayistic persona), 'Books think for me.'[1] Such a confession had nothing to do with a lack of *inventio*, or inventiveness, and everything to do with the associative nature of the essay as a form of belles-lettres. More than a marginal instance of the genre, the bibliographical essay reveals that the literary essay evolved less as a turn away from a monkish bookishness towards a free exploration of selfhood than as a journey through the realm of a literary subjectivity always already bound up with books. We often take Montaigne's word for the idea that the essay form is based on lived experience, forgetting that such experience as reflected in the essay is the product of a bookish mind, one that does not distinguish readily between 'real' and 'imaginary'. As we shall see, the bibliographical essay initiated by De Bury and reappropriated by Romantic essayists captures the fundamental bookishness – essential but not always evident and sometimes purposely obscured – in the essayistic writing and thinking of the formative years of the British essay tradition.

After considering the origins of the bibliographical essay in *Philobiblon*, this chapter will trace the development of the essay in eighteenth-century print culture, when essays circulated no longer in bound books as the collected work of an individual author, like those of previous centuries, but in the unbound (freer, cheaper) format of the essay periodical, often the work of more than one author.[2] Periodical essayists reflected on their authorial role in a world controlled by the bookseller, often instructing literary and aesthetic values that ran up against the material yardstick of consumerism. But in the age of British bibliomania (roughly 1790–1830), Romantic essayists celebrated the materiality, as well as the more abstract literary value, of books. Fetishising what we now call 'antiquarian' books, they found in the old, handmade quarto – or folio or octavo, as the case may be – a source of authenticity transcending the anonymous, industrialised nature of the book as commodity.

Origins of the Bibliographical Essay

Before the widespread adoption of moveable type in Europe, a book was an individual work of art: the product not only of an author, but of multiple artisans. Known as codices, such books consisted of parchment or other

[1] C. Lamb, 'Detached thoughts on books and reading' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 6 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 172.
[2] See J.R. Wood, 'Essayistic personae and personhood', in this volume (Ch. 10).

treated animal skins folded and stitched together in the form of a book, rather than rolled up as a scroll. Any one codex might involve the arts of the scribe or calligrapher, the illustrator (miniaturist or illuminator), the papermaker, the leather dresser, the tooler, the gilder, the binder, and the silversmith, among others. As a result, *all* books were rare. Bibliographical propriety assumed that books must be kept in as pristine a condition as possible – free from markings, marginalia, and other expressive smudges that reveal interaction with the human world. Whereas essayists 500 years later would find that readerly traces gave a book character, the medieval bibliophile militated against all reading habits that produced them. Richard de Bury's librarianship was a cloistered practice of book preservation, as in institutional rare book rooms today.

From its origins, the essay form was a miscellaneous, sponge-like genre, absorbing and repurposing various literary conventions, and this is certainly true of De Bury's *Philobiblon*. His essays focused on bibliographical topics like the collection, arrangement, and maintenance of books, though they were infused with enough 'bibliographical imagination' to qualify them as more than early ventures in library science.[3] Like Montaigne and Bacon following him, De Bury deployed the device of *topoi* (places) used in commonplace books to organise quotations from his reading.[4] De Burian titles like 'Of the Advantages of the Love of Books' and 'Of the Gradual Perfecting of Books' will seem familiar to modern readers.

The medieval essayist also made good use of the complaint as a literary device. This convention of Old English poetry was often expressed in the voice of an abandoned woman, and we can think of Wordsworth's 'Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman' in *Lyrical Ballads* as harking back to this tradition. But the complaint also took other forms. In 'The Complaint of Deor', an Anglo-Saxon bard bemoans the loss of his noble patron, while in 'The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse', the poet appeals to King Henry IV for money. Preceding Geoffrey Chaucer, De Bury's 'The Complaint of Books against the Clergy', 'The Complaint of Books against the Possessioners', and 'The Complaint of Books against the Mendicants' repurpose the Anglo-Saxon convention in a clerical context. De Bury's 'The Complaint of Books against

[3] See A. Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[4] On the commonplace-book and the essay, see A. Vine's account in Ch. 3 of this volume ('Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay').

Wars' prefigures Samuel Johnson's *Idler* no. 22, which also delivers the essayist's complaint in the voice of a non-human entity, in this case a vulture.

A later convention informing the British periodical essay was the conduct book. Johnson identifies Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano* (1528) and Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo* (1558) as precursors to the periodical essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele: 'Before the *Tatler* and *Spectator* ... No writers had yet undertaken to reform either the savageness of neglect or the impertinence of civility, to shew when to speak or to be silent, how to refuse or how to comply.'[5] Addison himself, in *Spectator* no. 409, identifies the Spanish Gratian (Baltasar Gracián y Morales), author of the conduct book *Oráculo Manual y Arte de Prudencia* (1647), as an influence.[6]

But the bibliographical essayist De Bury preceded the Renaissance genre of the conduct book in *Philobiblon* by castigating all the barbarisms that took place in the library. Just as later etiquette guides would caution against, for instance, sneezing at table, De Bury's essay 'Of Showing Due Propriety in the Custody of Books' scolds those readers who, noses dripping from the cold, bedew the pages of their book 'with the ugly moisture'.[7] He insists that books be unclasped with clean, rather than 'wet and perspiring hands', and revolts at the sight of fingernails stuffed with 'fetid filth as black as jet'.[8] He chastises chattering readers who spew forth 'senseless arguments' in 'sputtering showers' over their books, and prandial readers who dribble cheese and breadcrumbs in their books and spill drinks upon them.[9] And he rails against readers who after a short spell of study indulge in a lengthy nap over their book, wrinkling its pages and damaging its spine, and others who scribble in the margins to keep themselves awake. Worse still were those who tore out the flyleaves inserted in books for protection to use as notepaper. While such abominations took place indoors, outdoor readers stuck straws in their books as placeholders, distending them beyond what could be comfortably clasped, and sentimentally stuffed their books 'with violets, and primroses, with roses and quatrefoil'.[10] Condemning such habits, De Bury lashed out in the Menippean manner of later satiric essayists.

[5] S. Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* (London: J.M. Dent, 1925), p. 334.
[6] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 409 (9 June 1712) in J. Ferguson (ed.), *The British Essayists*, 2nd ed., 40 vols. (London: J. Richardson, 1823), vol. 10, p. 58. I use this superbly edited edition for convenience, drawing from a range of essay series included in it.
[7] R. de Bury, *The Philobiblon of Richard de Bury*, trans. E.C. Thomas (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1888), p. 238.
[8] Ibid. [9] Ibid. [10] Ibid., pp. 155–9.

Books in the Age of the Essay

The format in which the literary periodical essays of the eighteenth century circulated seemed to demand an acknowledgement of their social and historical context in a way that prior essays, published in books, did not. While individual numbers of periodicals like *The Tatler* (1709–11) and *The Spectator* (1711–14) would be collected in books at the end of a run, they initially appeared in the much cheaper and more ephemeral format of the broadside, or single folio sheet. Steele, in the voice of Sir Isaac Bickerstaff, excused the penny price of *The Tatler* as defraying the cost of a clean shirt and tobacco needed to enter the Grecian coffeehouse to gather material for his paper, and Addison's Spectator, in *Spectator* no. 46, drops his notes for future papers in Lloyd's coffeehouse and then pretends not to recognise them when they are discovered and laughed at. In *Spectator* no. 568, we find Addison's Spectator smoking at a table with readers gathered around his paper who do not recognise him as the author they are criticising (and indeed suspecting of treason).

Addison and Steele sought to distance themselves from books as objects and reorient cultural value in the immaterial qualities of literature. In *Tatler* no. 80, Steele distinguished the expense of book learning from the cost of his own periodical papers. Pointing to 'the exorbitant price of late years put upon books, and consequently on learning', he promised that 'these our lucubrations, though hereafter printed by Aldus, Elzevir, or Stephens, shall not advance above *one single penny*'.[11] That penny price diminishes further when we consider that each copy of any given number of the paper likely had around twenty readers. By contrast, prestigious European publishers like the Aldine Press in Venice, the House of Elzevir in the Netherlands, and the French publisher Henri Estienne (Steele's 'Stephens') produced pricey editions of the classics for an elite cadre of readers.

Addison mentions the same fetishised publishing houses when, in *Tatler* no. 158, he caricatures the figure of the bibliographer as a learned dunce:

> Tom Folio is a broker in learning, employed to get together good editions, and stock the libraries of great men. There is not a sale of books begins till Tom Folio is seen at the door. There is not an auction where his name is not heard, and that too in the very nick of time, in the critical moment, before the last decisive stroke of the hammer. There is not a subscription goes forward, in which Tom is not privy to the first rough draught of the

[11] R. Steele, *Tatler*, no. 80 (13 October 1709) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 5, p. 43.

> proposals; nor a catalogue printed, that doth not come to him wet from the press. He is an universal Scholar, so far as the title-page of all authors; knows the manuscripts in which they were discovered, the editions through which they have passed, with the praises or censures which they have received from the several members of the learned world. He has a greater esteem for Aldus and Elzevir, than for Virgil and Horace. If you talk of Herodotus, he breaks out into a panegyric upon Harry Stephens. He thinks he gives you an account of the author when he tells the Subject he treats of, the name of the editor, and the year in which it was printed. Or if you draw him into further particulars, he cries up the goodness of the paper, extols the diligence of the corrector, and is transported with the beauty of the letter.[12]

Tom Folio's name derives from the hierarchy of standard book sizes. The folio, being the largest size, was the most expensive, and the bibliographical scale of rank and precedence descended from there, through the quarto, octavo, and duodecimo. In *Spectator* no. 529, Addison jokes: 'I have observed that the author of a folio, in all companies and conversations, sets himself above the author of a quarto, the author of a quarto above the author of an octavo; and so on, by a gradual descent and subordination, to an author in twenty-fours.'[13] Yet, the essayist's point in both papers is that taste has less to do with the physical properties of books as show items than with the capacity to judge their immaterial contents. For all his book knowledge, Tom Folio is a mere pedant who knows nothing, from Addison's perspective, worth knowing about books.

The periodical essayist, by instructing principles of *literary* taste, sought to level the playing field for those who could not culturally compete against the kind of book barons who would have employed Tom Folio to build their collections. Writing in the persona of 'Mr Town' at mid-century, George Colman and Bonnell Thornton comment on the novelty of the form of literary 'essays or (*as they are termed*) periodical papers'. In the same number of their own periodical, *The Connoisseur* (no. 3), they observe that neither the English classical scholar Richard Bentley nor the Dutch scholar Pieter Burman, 'nor any other equally sagacious commentator, has been able to discover the least traces of any similar productions among the ancients'. Although there was some continuity between, say, the epistles of Seneca and the essays of Montaigne, it was hardly to be supposed that 'Seneca dealt out his morality every Saturday' as the Connoisseur did his on Thursdays, or

[12] J. Addison, *Tatler*, no. 158 (13 April 1710) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 3, p. 255.
[13] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 529 (6 November 1712) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 11, pp. 249–50.

'that Virgil and Horace clubbed together to furnish the poetry for a Roman magazine'.[14] Such metacommentary on the periodical essay as a form deeply embedded in its historical moment can be found over and over again.

Johnson similarly historicised the periodical format in which he was publishing the essays of the *Rambler*, the *Idler*, and the *Adventurer* by invoking the ancients. Adapting the proverb μέγα βιβλίον, μέγα κακόν (a great book is a great evil) by the Greek Callimachus to his era of burgeoning print culture in *Idler* no. 85, he speculated that, should 'the ancient sage' who coined the phrase visit contemporary London, he would surely 'think the multitude of books a multitude of evils'.[15] His comment bears comparison with Addison's portrait of Tom Folio as a book-loving fool. 'It is observed that *a corrupt society has many laws*', Johnson remarked. 'I know not whether it is not equally true, that *an ignorant age has many books*.'[16]

The Essayist and the Bookseller

One anxiety the periodical essayist faced was in negotiating the role of authorship in a commercial print culture where authority was given over to the bookseller. In the opening number of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Bee* in 1759, the bookseller explains to the essayist how the division of labour operates in the print industry:

> the republic of letters is at present divided into three classes. One writer, for instance, excels at a plan, or a title-page, another works away at the body of the book, and a third is a dab at an index. Thus a Magazine is not the result of any single man's industry, but goes through as many hands as a new pin, before it is fit for the public.[17]

This quotation (astonishingly) precedes Adam Smith's discussion of the division of labour based on the example of manufacturing a pin in *The Wealth of Nations*. In both cases, the mastermind of the production process was no longer the artist or artisan but the businessman.

[14] G. Colman and B. Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3 (14 February 1764) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 26, pp. 11–12. For more on Seneca as an influence on the essay form, see H. Power's 'Ancient influences on the essay' in this volume (Ch. 1).

[15] S. Johnson, *Idler*, no. 85 (24 December 1751) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 19, pp. 296–9.

[16] Ibid., p. 297.

[17] O. Goldsmith, *Bee*, no. 1 (6 October 1759) in *The Bee and Other Essays* (London: J.M. Dent, 1903), pp. 2–3.

A bookseller appears also in *Connoisseur* no. 3 to instruct the essayist about the ways of the print world. As the Connoisseur falls asleep over a book, with a guilty conscience for not having completed his weekly page and a half of copy, his publisher rises up before him as the 'genius' of an ocean of ink: 'His complexion was of the darkest hue, not unlike that of the Dæmons of a printing-house; his jetty beard shone like the bristles of blacking-brush; on his head he wore a turban of imperial paper.'[18] These daemons are printers' apprentices, known at the time as 'printers' devils', for they were often covered in black ink. The 'blacking-brush', to which the bookseller's beard is compared, was an instrument used to colour the edges of books, a process that, like gilding and tooling, formed part of the decorative arts of the bookmaker. Rather than being crowned with laurel or holding a scale of judgment, he appears turbaned in a paper size whose generous margins indicated an expensive book. His power is linked to book production, rather than literary or critical genius. In his left hand, he bears a rolled-up, corrected proof sheet, while in his right, he holds a goose quill, which would have been as useful to the businessman as to the author. Yet, from an authorial perspective, what is most disturbing about the portrait is how closely the bookseller encroaches on the ideal of genius with his page of text in the making and his writing implement.

The Connoisseur takes his revenge through a literary allusion to Shakespeare that typecasts the bookseller as a fool. As Sir John Hawkins explains in a note to a line from *King John* that Colman and Thornton quote, 'When fools were kept for diversion in great families, they were distinguished by a calf's-skin coat, which had the buttons down the back; and this they wore that they might be known for fools, and escape the resentment of those whom they provoked with their waggeries.'[19] The robe of the bibliopolic deity in the Connoisseur's dream was made, like contemporary bookbindings, of calfskin, and it suggests a deluxe edition, being 'gilt on the back, and faced with robings of Morocco' (finely grained goatskin).[20] And yet, a reader of literary taste would recognise the unattributed, adapted line from Shakespeare: 'There hung a calf-skin on his reverend limbs.'[21] The literary Connoisseur undermines the bookseller's prestige, for the sense of 'recreant' from Shakespeare's play ('And hang a calf's-skin on those *recreant* limbs!')

[18] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, p. 13.
[19] Sir John Hawkins quoted in W. Shakespeare, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators*, ed. E. Malone, 21 vols. (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, et al., 1821), vol. 15, p. 271 n.
[20] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, p. 13.
[21] Shakespeare quoted in ibid., p. 13.

shadows the ironic 'reverend' describing the bookseller.[22] Like Addison's Tom Folio, this 'genius', in his concern for the bibliographical features of books, is a type of Tom Fool, whose calfskin wraps him as well as his books.

The Connoisseur adds that the calfskin cloak of the bibliopolic deity is 'lettered (like a rubric-post) with the names of the most eminent authors'.[23] The process of rubrication (from the Latin *rubrum*, meaning red) was used in the early days of the printed book to produce dual-toned title pages, and the eighteenth-century publisher Bernard Lintot was known for hanging his red-and-black title pages on the doorposts of his bookshop on Fleet Street by way of advertising. Alexander Pope's satire of the British republic of letters in *The Dunciad* refers to the same rubric-post: 'Hence springs each weekly Muse, the living boast / Of Curll's chaste press, and Lintot's rubric post.'[24] The publisher Edmund Curll, whom Pope ironically labels 'chaste', was known for printing 'scandalously immoral' newspapers and pamphlets, and many of the titles he 'produced so rapidly and inexpensively to meet popular demand have not survived'.[25] Pope's 'weekly Muse' evokes the genre of periodical publication (as in the weekly *Connoisseur*) as well as its ephemerality since a new muse appears at the bookshop each week.

As the essayist looks out over the 'Ocean of Ink'[26] with his bookseller at his elbow (perhaps signalling the worn 'out at the elbows' coat of the Grub-Street writer), he sees the two extremes of print culture: light skiffs sailing without the aid of a chart or a compass (like the periodical essayist) and heavily loaded barges resembling those annotated editions in which a single line of verse is weighed down with a whole page of notes (as in the line from *King John* quoted by Bonnell and Thornton in Edward Malone's edition of Shakespeare). These latter vessels 'sailed very heavy' and 'were often a-ground', and like the critics in scholarly editions, 'continually ran foul on each other'.[27] Samuel Johnson claimed to find no difference between 'a bulky writer who engrossed a year' and 'a swarm of pamphleteers who

[22] W. Shakespeare, *King John* in Malone (ed.), *Plays and Poems*, p. 271 (my emphasis).
[23] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, p. 13.
[24] A. Pope, *The Dunciad With Notes Variorum, and the Prolegomena of Scriblerus* (London: L. Gilliver, 1729), p. 73.
[25] H.R. Tedder, 'Curll, Edmund' in L. Stephen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885–1900*, Vol. 13 (London: Smith, Elder, 1888), p. 328; M.J.M. Ezell, 'Booksellers and the book trade: John Dunton Edmund Curll, Grub Street, and the rise of Bernard Lintot' in J. Bate and C. Burrow (eds.), *The Oxford English Literary History*, Vol. 5: *1645–1715, The Later Seventeenth Century*, online ed. (Oxford Academic, 2017), pp. 1645–714, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198183112.001.0001 (accessed 7 August 2023).
[26] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, p. 14. [27] Ibid., pp. 14, 16.

stole each an hour', for, as he says in the *Idler*, both were 'equal wasters of human life'.[28]

Yet, the Connoisseur does spy one safe passage between the rocky shoals of scholia and adversaria, and the eddies of ephemeral periodical writing. 'The discovery of that passage', the bookseller genius explains to the essayist, 'was first made by one Bickerstaff, in the good ship called The Tatler, and who afterward embarked in The Spectator and Guardian. These have been followed since by a number of little sloops, skiffs, hoys, and cock-boats, which have been most of them wrecked in the attempt.'[29] In the third number of *The Connoisseur*, the essayistic persona Mr Town, in setting out in his periodical essay series, is facing the same risk of being wrecked in the attempt to follow Addison and Steele in the more lasting line of periodical literature. As the essay draws to a close, the inky genius (bookseller) plunges the essayist 'headlong into the inky flood', and he wakes up, thrashing about, only to recognise in the fading features of the genius his own publisher-bookseller, standing over him, demanding his weekly copy.[30]

Uses to which Periodical Papers are Put

Confronting the same concern about the role of the periodical essayist in a commercial print industry controlled by the bookseller, the British essayist Richard Bathurst, in *Adventurer* no. 6, directed his satire not at the bookseller 'Mr Bibliopola' but rather at the mercenary writer-for-hire who willingly sacrificed his literary ambitions to Mammon. At the start of the essay, the Adventurer is startled from his slumber by one 'Timothy Spinbrain', a self-styled 'brother of the quill'.[31] His name reflects the age-old comparison between the spinning of text and the spinning of textiles, both industries that were becoming subject to the forces of mechanisation. But it also reflects the flightiness of an author whose head is spinning in a crowded marketplace and who cannot finish any of the projects he contracts with the London booksellers. In the fourth number of his *Covent-Garden Journal*, Henry Fielding defined an author as 'a laughing Stock' and 'a poor Fellow, and in general an Object of Contempt'.[32] But Spinbrain, while fully complicit in

[28] Johnson, *Idler*, no. 85, pp. 296–9.
[29] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, pp. 16–17.
[30] Ibid., p. 17.
[31] R. Bathurst, *Adventurer*, no. 6 (25 November 1752) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 20, p. 30.
[32] H. Fielding, *Covent-Garden Journal*, no. 4 (14 January 1752) in D. Gigante (ed.), *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 167.

treating literature as a trade, resists becoming one of the ragged regiment of professional authors who are objects of contempt, for his purpose is to outwit the bookseller. 'Ah', he says to the Adventurer, 'we shall humble those fellows – we need not care a farthing for Mr Bibliopola.'[33]

He boasts of his most recent scheme to break free from the bibliopoles, the bosses of the commercial book world who control authors through commission, by forging and selling a collection of manuscripts at auction. Yet, the only text he has managed to produce in that direction is an advertisement:

> *Will be sold by* Auction
> *A curious and valuable Collection of Manuscripts*
> *(warranted Originals) in Prose and Verse:*
> *Being the entire Stock in Trade of*
> Timothy Spinbrain, *Author,*
> *Leaving off Business.*

Although Spinbrain claims to be going out of business, his real purpose is to earn enough money at auction to enable him to do so. The project is on a scale with his other unrealisable plans, for he intends to print 20,000 copies of a catalogue to be distributed to 'all the lovers of literature throughout the three kingdoms' as well as to 'the virtuosi in Holland, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, and elsewhere'.[34] In a further dig at booksellers, bibliographers, and other Tom Fools of the book world who don't recognise his genius, he intends to produce forged certificates of authenticity to accompany his forged manuscripts. Spinbrain suggests the cynicism of an author who has recognised the logic of the commodity in a business where even unique manuscripts and old books are traded and where authenticity works like currency to be printed and forged.

Spinbrain is not the only professional writer who appears in the periodical essays of the eighteenth century as eager to escape from his profession. Edward Moore, writing in the persona of Adam Fitz-Adam, claims that while he began his periodical *The World* (1753–7) as Addison and Steele had done, with the goal of improving manners and taste, his ambitions had turned monetary. In *World* no. 183, he confesses that his goal is to earn enough money from the paper to quit the periodical business entirely. To that end, he shamelessly encourages practices like wrapping pies and rolling hair with his essays.

[33] Bathurst, *Adventurer*, no. 6, p. 35. [34] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

He tells us that it was his habit to stop by Robert Dodsley's bookshop on Thursday mornings (when *The World* appeared) to 'observe the great demand for these my lucubrations'. The word is one we have seen before, when Steele promises that 'these our lucubrations', though they should later be bound in the most expensive tooled leather based on their literary merit, would not rise above the price of a penny. The Latinate term 'lucubrations', indicating work by candlelight, implies scholarly activity, hence bookishness, and it became a code word setting the literary essayist apart from the wider sphere of newspaper journalists who might report on the news without reflecting on it, philosophically, morally, or otherwise. While Steele identified the articles of *The Tatler* with their date and place of origin in the manner of the newspaper article, he concluded each number with his lucubrations datelined 'From My Apartment', a gesture that imbued the paper, for all its social chattiness, with the weight and authority of authorial reflection. 'Myself, and every petty journalist', the Connoisseur remarks, 'affect to dignify our hasty performances by styling them Lucubrations.'[35] But Adam Fitz-Adam quickly discovers that *his* lucubrations appeal less to Robert Dodsley's customers than the paper on which they are printed.

When he enters the bookshop one morning, Mr World has 'the mortification of hearing a footman delivering a message, "that his lady desires Mr Dodsley will send her in no more WORLDS, for that she has cut off her hair, and shall have no occasion for them any longer"'.[36] In an essay by Addison or Steele, we might expect this to be an opportunity to moralise on the superficiality of society, which fails to appreciate literary merit. But Fitz-Adam ironically redirects his criticism from the unliterary ladies to the French hairdressers who have imported the fashion for short hair, reducing the need for curling papers and thereby stripping him of a good part of his readership. Rejecting the Addisonian ideal of disinterestedness, he is more than willing to prostitute his paper for whatever purpose might bring him money. He praises a certain grocer in the Strand, who wraps every ounce of tea that he sells, as well as 'all his sugars and spices', in *The World*. He praises the grocer's wife and five daughters, who do a good deal of needlework, for making their thread-papers from his periodical. Rather than looking down his nose at them, or at the pastry cooks who might eye his periodical as baking paper, he appeals to the royal household to command that 'all the tarts, pyes,

[35] Colman and Thornton, *Connoisseur*, no. 3, p. 12.
[36] E. Moore, *World*, no. 183 (1 July 1756) in Ferguson (ed.), *British Essayists*, vol. 25, p. 231.

pastry, and confectionary of any kind whatsoever, appertaining to his majesty's household, be constantly baked upon these papers'.[37]

Unlike Moore's persona Fitz-Adam, Henry Fielding's 'Sir Alexander Drawcansir' is ever ready to draw his sword (or pen) on behalf of the republic of letters. Rather than encouraging the confectioners to make use of his papers, he complains of the same lot who use his *Covent-Garden Journal* as packaging, staining his printed pages 'with the juice of gooseberries, currants, and damascenes' and in the process reducing his lucubrations 'to the ignoble Purpose of supporting a tart or a custard'.[38] He also takes aim at the trunk makers who 'seem to take a delight in dismembering authors; and in placing their several limbs together in the most absurd manner', so that 'while the bottom of a trunk contains a piece of poetry, the top presents us with a sheet of romance, and the sides and ends are adorned with mangled libels of various kinds'.[39] Fielding's trunkmaker is, on the one hand, another figure of commercial industry with no regard for literary endeavour, degrading periodical literature to the ignoble service of lining wooden trunks, but he is also a figure of the bookseller, scrapping together text and assembling it at will into a commodity whose sole purpose for the producer is monetary gain. While usually only books deemed worthless met such fates – and William Hogarth names a few of them in his satirical portrait of a basket of books on its way to the trunkmaker at St Paul's Churchyard (London's book district) in *Beer Street* (1751) – the periodical essayist was keenly aware of his vulnerability to being seen as no more than scrap paper through the inexpensive medium in which he was publishing.

Moore contrasts the ephemeral, individual numbers of his paper with the loftier idea of a collected edition, which Fitz-Adam seems to think would enjoy an eternal life in any number of private libraries. He encourages grocers, seamstresses, and piemen – hence, by extension, cooks, trunkmakers, flower vendors, butchers, and anyone else who might find a use for his papers – so that he might 'continue the *World*, till a perfect library might be made of it, which otherwise must have an end before a hundred volumes can be completed'.[40] If we consider that *The Spectator* was complete in eight volumes, a hundred volumes of *The World* would seem as unrealisable a publishing scheme as Spinbrain's auction sale catalogue. The longevity

[37] Ibid., p. 233.
[38] H. Fielding, *Covent-Garden Journal*, no. 6 (21 January 1752) in Gigante (ed.), *The Great Age of the English Essay*, p. 172.
[39] Ibid. [40] Moore, *World*, no. 183, p. 233.

and success of the essay periodical, Moore suggests, depends not on its literary quality but on the fine calfskin bindings in which he hopes to see them covered, shelved, and admired from afar, probably never to be opened again.

Essays in the Age of Bibliomania

If the books in the age of the periodical essay served as foils to more abstracted ideas of literary value, old books served, in the bibliographical essays of the Romantic period, as venerable chroniclers (likewise in their own materiality) of an age before commerce controlled the world of letters. Romantic essayists found authenticity and character in the cracked skin of old books, reading like bibliographical physiognomists, personality in their lines – not only lines of printed text, but also handwritten lines of verse or prose commentary scrawled in books by former readers. The Romantic bibliomaniac appeared as a latter-day Tom Folio, who differed from his predecessor in one key respect: his book madness was a self-conscious, literary performance, not a form of close-minded pedantry in the science and technology of bookmaking to be mocked by the essayist.

One Romantic bibliographer, the Reverend Thomas Frognall Dibdin, had much to do with the craze for old books that raged in the era. Dibdin considered the works of eighteenth-century bibliographers as 'a mass of useful, but occasionally uninteresting, information' and their prose style 'a vast plain; wherein the traveller sees nothing, immediately, which is beautiful or inviting: few roses, or cowslips, or daisies'.[41] His description draws on the age-old analogy between floral and literary beauties, reflected in terms like 'anthology' (from the Greek *anthos*, flower) and 'flourish' (from Latin *flos* or *florem*). Walter Scott recognised the literary quality of Dibdin's essayistic, bibliographical writing in a letter to him: 'You have contrived to strew flowers over a path which, in other hands, would have proved a very dull one; and all *Bibliomanes* must remember you long, as he who first united their antiquarian details with good-humoured raillery and cheerfulness.'[42] Dibdin's *The Bibliomania; or Book-Madness; containing some account of the History, Symptoms, and Cure of this Fatal Disease* (1809) introduced the genre

[41] T.F. Dibdin, *Bibliomania; or Book Madness: A Bibliographical Romance*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for the author by J. McCreery, 1811), pp. 449–50.

[42] W. Scott to T.F. Dibdin, 13 June 1821, quoted in T.F. Dibdin, *Reminiscences of a Literary Life*, 2 vols. (London: J. Major, 1836), vol. 2, p. 675.

of Romantic bibliography as a self-parodic mode in which the essayist gleefully displays his own book foolery. The title page of the first edition featured a reprint of Albrecht Dürer's portrait of the Book Fool, above some lines spoken by the Book Fool in Sebastian Brandt's 1494 *Das Narrenschiff* (Ship of Fools). Tellingly, on his title page Dibdin attributes the lines not to their author (Brandt), nor to their first English translator (Alexander Barclay), but to their printer, Richard Pynson: 'Pynson's Ship of Fools. Edit. 1509'. Only a bibliomaniacal book fool would attribute lines of verse to a printer, and to a specific edition at that.

The associative nature of the Romantic bibliographical essay effectively freed the essayist from demonstrating mastery over a field of specialised knowledge. It formed part, however, of a longer belletristic tradition of the essay based, as I have argued, on bookishness. Montaigne, in his essay 'On Bookes' ('Des livres'), suggests that what the essayist seeks in books is a knowledge of himself, and William Cornwallis, following Montaigne in the British tradition, echoed this view in 'Of Essayes, & Bookes' (1600–1), reminding readers that his was 'an Essay, not a Catalogue' (or plain bibliography).[43] For Romantic essayists like Hazlitt writing in the age of bibliomania, books served as associative links to other readers, thoughts, and events but also to ghostly shades of former consciousness. In 'On Reading Old Books', Hazlitt describes books as 'links in the chain of our conscious being' that 'bind together the different scattered divisions of our personal identity'.[44] The same year this essay appeared, an essayist from *The New Monthly Magazine*, sitting down before a pile of old books in the British Museum, imagined that he could 'clearly perceive the fluid, which, according to the Cartesian doctrine, conveys the impressions from the page to the brain. From some of the volumes, which I discovered to be the old and the black letter, it arose, rich like incense, exhilarating the features and enlivening the eye; every thought that it communicated seemed to generate associations *ad infinitum*.'[45] Old books, this essayist suggests, provided opportunities to *think* in the form of the essay.

Old books also connected the essayist to a larger network of bookish communities. In 'The Book-Hunter's Club' (1861), the Scottish essayist John Hill Burton suggests that associations formed through books had reshaped

[43] Sir W. Cornwallis, Jr., *Essayes*, ed. D.C. Allen (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1946), p. 202; author's name modernised here as elsewhere in this volume.
[44] W. Hazlitt, 'On reading old books', *London Magazine*, 3:14 (February 1821), 129.
[45] Y., 'Old books', *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 2 (1821), 117.

the very nature of human subjectivity: 'He, the man – to himself the *ego*, and to others the mere *homo* – ceased to revolve around the centre of gravity of his own personality, and, following the instincts of his adhesive nature, resolved himself into an associative community.'[46] In this light, we might see the numerous book clubs and antiquarian societies that emerged in the age of bibliomania, such as the Roxburghe Club (founded by Dibdin, his patron Earl Spencer, and other book connoisseurs) and the Shakespeare Society (founded with the purpose of reprinting old and rare books, tracts, and manuscripts), as direct successors of the Tatler's and Spectator's Clubs.

Adopting a bibliographical metaphor in *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), a sequel to Thomas De Quincey's more well-known essay series, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), De Quincey depicts the human mind as a palimpsest, a parchment skin or other writing material from which text has been erased, though traces of it remain. 'What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?' he asks, rhetorically:

> Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished. And if, in the vellum palimpsest, lying amongst the other *diplomata* of human archives or libraries, there is anything fantastic or which moves to laughter, as oftentimes there is in the grotesque collisions of those successive themes, having no natural connection, which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll, yet, in our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain, there are not and cannot be such incoherencies.[47]

While an actual palimpsest can result in purely random, sometimes incongruous or 'grotesque' connections between texts, the associative palimpsest of the mind, he suggests, entails its own order. And as his peers in the essayistic mode of Romantic bibliography would have agreed, the same is true of the essay as a mode of thinking through books.

[46] [J.H. Burton], 'The book-hunter's club', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 90 (October 1861), 441.

[47] T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater . . . with its sequels, Suspiria de Profundis and The English Mail-Coach*, ed. M. Elwin (London: Macdonald, 1956), p. 510.

16

Satire and the Essay

JOHN STRACHAN

Wole Soyinka opens his essay 'The *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes' as follows: 'The sinister aspect of satire is easily overlooked – in exaggerating to a ludicrous degree it also poses a threat – suppose it really happens?'[1] Soyinka is writing about the ancient playwright Aristophanes, whose satirical drama, first performed over 2,000 years ago, takes aim at some age-old, if still highly relevant, satirical targets: militarism, war, sexual politics. The 'sinister' possibilities of satire – especially in its use of the reductio ad absurdum, dystopian speculation, and ambiguous tonal games with cruelty – are evident in Western literature from Attic comedy through Orwellian prose satire. They are also manifest in the satirical essay, which itself has a long history – if not quite as long as that of dramatic satire – of offering comedy with a moral purpose. This chapter examines the tonal ambiguities that render the satirical essay a key subgenre in the tradition of the essay in English.

Indeed, if we look at the satirical essay for a short, pithy meditation offering a universal truth, we will not often find it. Instead, from the work of the Anglo-Irish authors Jonathan Swift and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth to that of the Romantic prose stylists Thomas De Quincey and Thomas Love Peacock, to the postcolonial essays of the Kenyan author Ali Mazrui, we find that the satirical essay takes many forms. Its ironic complexity can be found in Swift's multivalency, in De Quincey's tonal pleasures, and in the Edgeworths' paradoxes. That their satirical essays set us up for finger-wagging but do not always deliver it – or at least make us debate (as per Swift's 'Modest Proposal') at what the finger is being wagged – testifies to the complexities of the satirical essay, which, at least in some of its finest historical examples, is not to be confused with soapbox oratory.

[1] W. Soyinka, 'The *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes' in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan, Nigeria: New Horn Press, 1988), p. 21.

A Modest Giant: Jonathan Swift

Swift's satirical essay, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick*, was first published in 1729, at the conclusion of a decade of bad harvests in Ireland, and it shows the power of the satirical essay to shock and disturb. The essay opens in the voice of an apparently charitable and well-meaning socio-economic commentator and begins reasonably, if mordantly, enough:

> It is a melancholy object to . . . see the streets . . . crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time . . . to beg sustenance for their helpless infants who, as they grow up, either turn thieves . . . or leave their dear native country, to . . . sell themselves to the Barbadoes.[2]

What is to be done? Plainly we are being set up for an answer, a solution to the intractable problems of Irish poverty. Adult Irish people 'selling' themselves to the West Indies is no solution, nor, even, is child labour: 'I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or a girl, before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds . . . at most.'[3] Here the essay starts to depart from the formal model of the political pamphlet. Faced with these grim realities, 'I shall now', the essayist goes on, 'therefore humbly propose my own thoughts.'[4] His is a radical solution to the manifold problems caused by Irish poverty. The 'excess' children of the poor should be served up as dinners to feed the appetites of the rich, thereby decreasing the surplus population: 'a young healthy Child well Nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome Food, whether *Stewed*, *Roasted*, *Baked*, or *Boiled*; and . . . will equally serve in a *Fricasie*, or a *Ragout*'.[5]

The essay, we now recognise, or at least sincerely hope we do, is a satirical one; but what is its target? The essayist persona is made to work through their idea with a remorselessly ironic logic; an Irish child, 'at a year old', can 'be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom . . . always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the

[2] J. Swift, *Irish Political Writings after 1725: A Modest Proposal and Other Works*, ed. D. Hayton and A. Rounce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 146.
[3] Ibid., p. 149. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid., pp. 149–50.

last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table'.[6] Though, as ever with Swift, there are real tonal complexities and ambiguities in the 'Modest Proposal'; there are also moments when the satire is momentarily unequivocal. Witness its occasional anti-landlordism: 'I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.'[7] Nonetheless, satire in this essay is generally more slippery.

Swift's essay has not infrequently been read as parodic, and that generic status is worth closer inspection. George Wittkowsky, in an important early plea for the centrality of the 'Modest Proposal' in the Swiftian satirical canon, and in the face of what he sees as critical bafflement and silence concerning the essay, views the work as satirical prose parody: 'The "Modest Proposal"', he maintains, 'is among other things, a burlesque on projects concerning the poor', aimed at 'a public accustomed to the sight of "humble petitions" and "modest proposals" displayed in the book-stalls . . . dealing with . . . problems concerning population, labour, unemployment and poverty.'[8] Swift lived in an era and a city noisy with polemical pamphleteering, and, certainly, its formal model is the rhetoric of contemporary political thinkers and economists.

An anonymous *Modest Proposal for the More Certain and yet More Easie Provision for the Poor and likewise for the better suppression of Thieves, Diminishers and Corrupters of the Coyn, and other Lewd Livers: tending much to the Advancement of Trade, especially in the most Profitable part of it, the Manufactures of the Kingdom* (1696), for instance, offered mercantilist solutions to the same problem which Swift was nominally addressing. The essay begins with a postulation of the issue at hand: 'the Land is weaken'd and wasted by *Sloth* and *Riot*; and . . . the number of those high Criminals, such as *Robbers*, *House-breakers* . . . and the like, doth daily rather encrease than diminish'.[9] It then offers a forceful corrective remedy: 'keep persons from getting into an Habit of *Idleness* and *Luxury*'.[10] Political essays like this provide a formal exemplar for Swift's parody, here defined as the use of a formal literary model to burlesque its ideology and internal logic (as opposed to satirical comic imitation, which borrows a formal model to mock an

[6] Ibid., p. 150. [7] Ibid., p. 151.

[8] G. Wittkowsky, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*: the biography of an early Georgian pamphlet', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 4:1 (January 1943), 88–9.

[9] Anon., *Modest Proposal for the More Certain and yet More Easie Provision for the Poor and likewise for the better suppression of Thieves, Diminishers and Corrupters of the Coyn, and other Lewd Livers: tending much to the Advancement of Trade, especially in the most Profitable part of it, the Manufactures of the Kingdom* (London: Printed for J. Southby, 1695 [i.e., 1696]), p. 1.

[10] Ibid., p. 2.

external, separate target). 'It is evident', maintains Wittkowsky, 'that Swift relied on the literature of current economic controversy for title, technique and theme.'[11] That said, it is important to remember that Swift's 'Modest Proposal' is a satirical essay – not an exercise in polemic, not political plain speaking.

One way of looking at the 'Modest Proposal' is charitable, summarised by Wittkowsky as a willingness to see the essay as 'satire directed against conditions in Ireland', viewing it as condemnatory of British attitudes to Ireland and the Irish poor, and as a sharp-elbowed assault on those attitudes.[12] That would put Swift in the 'Let's hear it for Ireland' school encapsulated by Francis Sylvester Mahony ('Father Prout') in 1834 in *Fraser's Magazine*. Prout maintains that the 'Modest Proposal' is an example of the 'intensity and fervour of the Dean's love of his oppressed country'.[13] Some modern critics have felt the same way. Robert Mahoney, in his 1995 monograph *Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity*, sees Swift's essay as a document that 'manifested real concern for the condition of the rural Catholic poor'.[14] It is a respectable critical position to see the 'Modest Proposal', with its *prima facie* brutal utilitarianism, as a satire on English exploitation of Ireland's resources. However, it is by no means the only tenable take on Swift's essay.

Claude Rawson has argued that Swift's 'contempt' for 'the Irish poor . . . as expressed in the "Modest Proposal" and elsewhere is as absolute as, and simultaneous with, his pity';[15] though it is nevertheless 'tempting to think of Swift's "Modest Proposal" as a parody of the kind of rhetoric found in essays such as "A Modest Proposal for the More Certain and yet More Easie Provision for the Poor". But there is no reason to suppose that his own attitude was radically different, or to attribute to him a Dickensian protest about child-labour.'[16] Rawson reads the 'Proposal' alongside Swift's sermon on the 'Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland', which criticises charity schools, claiming that they had 'failed in their purpose of supplying cheap labour, and had over-educated their pupils'.[17] Such a readerly stratagem means that the opening of the 'Modest Proposal' is a very complex exercise

[11] Wittkowsky, 'Swift's *Modest Proposal*', 104. [12] Ibid., 76.
[13] F.S. Mahony (Father Prout), 'Dean Swift's madness', *Fraser's Magazine*, 10 (July 1834), 27.
[14] R. Mahoney, *Jonathan Swift: The Irish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 58–9.
[15] C. Rawson, *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 128.
[16] Ibid. [17] Ibid.

in irony and its satire a good deal less good-natured and *bien pensant* when viewed from a modern perspective.[18] Jonathan Greenberg goes further even than Rawson, seeing Swift as complicit in odious stereotypes rather than satirising them. He argues that Swiftian satire participates in the dark English imaginative encounter with its Irish other: 'While on one level Swift is taking up the cause of the Irish, on another he [also] participates in the long English tradition of viewing the Irish as subhuman, capable of cannibalism, and deserving of being cannibalised.'[19]

Swift's satirical essay does not speak plainly. To my mind, the 'Modest Proposal' plays similar tonal games with register as can be found elsewhere in his writing, in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) most notably, but also in 'The Lady's Dressing Room' (1732) and 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed' (1734). In the latter, there is the sharpest possible discrepancy between the pastoral register invoked in the poem's title and the speaker's description (either pitiless or pitiful, depending on your view of Swift's sexual politics) of the 'nymph' as a used-up Drury Lane prostitute. At least half of the joke here, as in the 'Celia *shits*' refrain of 'The Lady's Dressing Room', is the discrepancy between elevated form and low content. Wittkowsky uses the word burlesque for the 'Modest Proposal' but some of the satirical power of the essay lies in its status as a travesty defined by that discrepancy. It is also an exercise in learned wit, a self-conscious display of pushing language to its limits, which takes the developing form of the essay to new and disturbing areas.

The 'Modest Proposal' has elements of the meta-essay in its knowing criticism of the limits of the form, its implication that the truth is not always to be found in the essay, that its pensées are not infallible, and that human experience is not always readily confined to a moral schema or its problems sorted out by 'the imposing of over-simplified ideals on experience', as Northrop Frye brilliantly puts it in his discussion of the 'target of satire'.[20] Frye sees 'philosophical pedantry' as the principal bullseye of much historic satire. It is certainly reasonable to see not only Swift's satire as resistant to didactic essayism (the aim, after all, of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*) but also to the satirical essays that followed and that, to varying extents, copied and

[18] Ibid. 'The opening paragraphs of the "Modest Proposal" acquire an irony a good deal less simple than is normally thought.'

[19] J. Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 110.

[20] N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 231.

adapted it. No one can mistake the idiom of the satirical essay for plain, referential language. Almost invariably, its language means more than it signifies *prima facie*. The use of irony, obliquity, and tonal games is common in the historical satirical essay, where there is also a self-referential sense of standing on a giant's shoulders (to use Newton's metaphor), the Brobdingnagian giant of the form being Swift.

Satirising Empire: Irish and Postcolonial Essayism

While it would be an exaggeration to see Swift's 'Modest Proposal' as a foundational document for all that comes after it in the tradition of the British satirical essay, it certainly acts as a point of origin and reference for 'An Essay on Irish Bulls' (1802) by the Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth. The authors see themselves as not only writing in the manner of the Dean of St Patrick's but as doing his satirical work for him. They maintain that they were prompted to composition by one of Swift's unacted desires, delivering the unwritten essay on English Bulls he supposedly once envisaged: '"I have it in contemplation", says he, "to write an essay on English bulls and blunders."'[21] The Edgeworths' understanding of Swift is that of a writer speaking Irish truth to English power. They, too, object to the 'sober contempt and smug self-satisfaction' with which the English treat the Irish.[22] They note the condescending, even contemptuous, English attitude to colloquial Irish discourse, its idiosyncratic language and logic, and (especially among what was then called the Irish lower orders) 'that propensity to blunder, which is commonly supposed to be characteristic of the Irish nation'.[23]

The Edgeworths' 'Essay on Irish Bulls' concerns linguistic blunders, 'usually called bulls'.[24] It is a long satirical essay investigating, on Dean Swift's behalf, if 'John Bull could ever have been subject to blunder'.[25] The answer is yes: there is a clue in his very name (meaning nonsense). The Edgeworths reinterpret jokes against the Irish, who, far from being ashamed of their supposed errors should actually be proud of their linguistic inventiveness: 'Innumerable ... instances of Irish eloquence ... crowd upon our recollection.'[26] Despite this, the English have placed 'the caps and bells ... on a

[21] M. Edgeworth and R.L. Edgeworth, 'An essay on Irish Bulls' in M. Butler and M. Myers (eds.), *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999–2003), vol. 1 (1999), p. 374.
[22] Ibid., p. 373. [23] Ibid., p. 371. [24] Ibid., p. 374. [25] Ibid., p. 122. [26] Ibid.

whole nation', and the Edgeworths employ a fusion of irony, Socratic dialogue, direct polemic, and extensive, well-chosen quotation to their ends. 'Even English genius', they write, 'is not always to be restrained within the strict limits of common sense.'[27] Notable English 'geniuses' like Edward Young, Samuel Johnson, and Isaac Newton make the case for the satirical prosecution: 'We English allow our poets and ourselves a licence of speech which we deny our Hibernian neighbours'; 'You need not say *Irish* bulls with such emphasis for bulls are not peculiar to Ireland.'[28]

Satire, for the Edgeworths, is primarily a means to an end: an eloquent defence of Irish culture. Lacking the complex tonal ambiguities of their satirical master, they drop their satirical mask in the 'Essay' and directly mount the pulpit: 'Unable any longer to support the tone of irony, we joyfully speak in our own characters, and explicitly declare our opinion, that the Irish are an ingenious, generous people; that the . . . blunders of which they are accused are often imputable to their neighbours, or . . . produced by their habits of using figurative and witty language.'[29] The Edgeworths' praise for Irish linguistic resourcefulness inheres in their mockery of bullishness amongst the English, from Shakespeare onwards. The essay, as Marilyn Butler puts it, is testimony to the Edgeworths being 'expressly committed . . . to the history, language, culture, and future of Irish people'.[30]

The 'Essay on Irish Bulls' has also been seen as a post-Swiftian (at least in the satirical aspect of that term) defence of the Irish against a particularly insidious piece of imperialism: the linguistic. According to Clara Tuite, the essay 'offers a counter-history of the Union by illuminating how rhetorical or symbolic violence underwrites the material violence of empire'.[31] Mitzi Myers, in 'Goring John Bull: Maria Edgeworth's Hibernian High Jinks versus the Imperialist Imaginary' (1995), sees the 'Essay' not only as part of Maria Edgeworth's career-long project of 'revaluat[ing] English stereotypes of the Irish Other', but of her effort to register and indict the sexual politics of empire.[32] The 'Essay', Myers concludes, offers an 'urbanely witty dismissal . . . of masculinist historiographies and system building'.[33]

[27] Ibid. [28] Ibid., pp. 153, 130–4, 126. [29] Ibid., p. 151.
[30] M. Butler, 'Edgeworth's Ireland: history, popular culture, and secret codes', *Novel*, 34:2 (2001), 267.
[31] C. Tuite, 'Late disturbances: Maria Edgeworth's *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802)', *Women's History Review*, 20:5 (2011), 729.
[32] M. Myers, 'Goring John Bull: Maria Edgeworth's Hibernian high jinks versus the imperialist imaginary' in J.E. Gill (ed.), *Cutting Edges: Postmodern Critical Essays on Eighteenth-Century Satire* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 372.
[33] Ibid., p. 381.

Reading Swift and the Edgeworths after him in terms of direct influence might be seen as flattening out the ironic voice on offer in the satirical essay. The latter, remember, expressly set aside that voice, acting, in effect, as *soi-disant* critics of their own work. The Swiftian stance is, after all, entirely understandable given that 'the satirist', as Humbert Wolfe once remarked, has traditionally been seen as occupying 'a place half-way between the preacher and the wit. He has the purpose of the first and uses the weapons of the second.'[34] However, if Dean Swift was preaching, then his message was open, as we have seen, to a variety of interpretations. The Edgeworths, however, attempt to smooth out the ambiguities of the Irish essay by reading Swift in unequivocal terms as a nationalist of their own Protestant Ascendancy sort by abandoning satire to the business end of their essay.

To give one more, and more modern, example of post-Swiftian essayistic satire, writing from a postcolonial, rather than an anticolonial, perspective, and nearly two centuries after the Edgeworths (demonstrating the endurance of this satirical manner in the essay in English), Ali Mazrui, in his 1979 'In Search of Pax Africana' strikes a position somewhere between the more slippery Swiftian voice of the satirist and the Edgeworths' swerve through satire to didacticism. He too indicts the multifarious and malign legacies of colonialism, pointing out the bitter irony of the Western world striking a pose of civilisation during the last gasps of empire while simultaneously waging world wars and raining down hydrogen bombs on civilian populations. Mazrui begins with an important, ironic question: 'Now that the imperial order is coming to an end, who is to keep the peace in Africa?'[35] Helping his reader to an answer, he deploys the time-honoured devices of the satirical essay: irony, paradox, political rhetoric at times pointedly bitter and at others teasingly ambiguous, and the leading of his reader into unsettling moral terrain. During the period of British Empire, as Mazrui puts it, 'the assumption [was] that Western powers ha[d] special privileges for being armed to the teeth, while at the same time proceeding to disarm the natives'.[36] The colonial belief was that the 'Western powers were civilised enough to initiate world wars, but Africans had to be stopped from waging tribal conflicts.'[37] Now, in a postcolonial world, Africa can wage its own grown-up wars, with grown-up weapons: 'No longer will the great powers

[34] H. Wolfe, *Notes on English Verse Satire* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), p. 7.
[35] I quote from the transcript of Mazrui's original BBC Reith lecture. For a revised version of the essay, see A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (London: W. Heinemann, 1980), pp. 113–38.
[36] Ibid., p. 2. [37] Ibid.

be permitted to say that such and such a weapon is "not for Africans and children under sixteen".'[38]

The African continent, Mazrui writes in a tone of ironic triumphalism, now consists of 'independent nations' that have the freedom to 'put aside' the 'non-violence and non-alignment'[39] preached by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the days of agitation for an independent subcontinent, and follow India into the nuclear age. Africans should lose their 'nuclear inhibitions' and act like Western 'grown-ups':

> When little white children misbehave in some Western societies the mother may sometimes say, 'Behave yourself – or a big black man will come and take you away.' Today we are dealing not with little white children, but with white grown-ups in northern chanceries who need to be threatened with the danger of big black men wielding nuclear devices. I realise this will sound outrageous to many people. Imagine Emperor Bokassa playing Napoleon with a nuclear bomb – or Idi Amin doing a war dance with an atomic device![40]

This is uncomfortable reading. The idea that the way to African postcolonial potency lies in a form of military hypermasculinity to match the West's is something we can imagine Swift proposing. Mazrui's essay participates in a tradition of unsettling political satire that stretches back to 'A Modest Proposal' as an outrageous proposal that we can only wonder whether – and to what degree – the essayist embraces.

Sublime Satire: Where Gothic Meets Comic

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once borrowed – and greatly enjoyed – an old book from Charles Lamb's library, the third edition of John Reynolds's *The Triumphs of Gods Revenge against the Cryinge, & Execrable Sinne, of (Willfull, & Premeditated) Murther* (1657). Coleridge admired the 'honest Murthereo-Maniacal' Reynolds, whose book demonstrates no conscious irony on the part of its author. Coleridge writes that:

> It is exceedingly entertaining to observe, how absolutely & integrally J. Reynold's heart & soul are swallowed up in the notion 'Murder,' & in all other crimes only as far as they lead to Murder. The most execrable Wretch about to be murdered, becomes 'poor innocent man' – 'worthy harmless Gentleman,' &c. – And then his never for a moment, not for half a

[38] Ibid., p. 5. [39] Ibid., p. 2. [40] Ibid., pp. 5, 6.

> sentence, relaxing or elanguescing, from the height & high top gallant of Sensibility & impassioned Moralizing upon all & every act, however often repeated, from p. 1 to p. 486 – so flatly delicious, so deliciously flat![41]

In block capital enthusiasm, the poet concludes 'I LIKE JOHN REYNOLDS. S.T.C.'[42] Coleridge looks into Reynolds's *30 Several Tragical Histories* (another part of the volume's elephantine title), examples drawn from the early modern bibliomaniac's library of murder, and finds exceeding entertainment. He also ventures into mock sublimity in labelling Reynolds 'Murthereo-Maniacal' (not one of Coleridge's neologisms to make it into the *Oxford English Dictionary*) and in gently mocking his 'high top gallant of Sensibility'.

This momentary fusion of comedy, murder, and the sublime in Coleridge's notes is what best characterises his former friend Thomas De Quincey's satirical essays on murder, which both elevate satire into the sublime by aestheticising terror and play Swiftian games with tonal register in treating cruelty and viciousness as if they were an art to be compared to his beloved opera. Murder and street crime become theatrical spectacle. Where Swiftian burlesque frequently relies for comic effect on the contrast between high culture (lyric poetry) and low matter (excrement), De Quincey's own post-Swiftian essays exploit the formal contrast between the learned essay (and learned society) and matter as low as can be imagined: child murder and pitiless acts of violence.

De Quincey's three satirical essays 'On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts' (1827, 1839, 1854), supposedly capture the proceedings of a 'Society of Connoisseurs in Murder'. His society's members are 'dilettanti in the various modes of bloodshed . . . in short, Murder-Fanciers. Every fresh atrocity of that class . . . they . . . criticise as they would a picture, statue, or other work of art.'[43] Some of them are of the 'things aren't what they used to be' school of murder criticism; one of them, known as Toad in the Hole ('so called from his gloomy misanthropical disposition'), constantly disparages modern homicide and principally confines his reading in murder to Coleridge's favourite: 'he rarely spoke, he seemed conversing with phantoms in the air, his housekeeper informed us that his reading was nearly confined

[41] S.T. Coleridge, marginalia on J. Reynolds's *The Triumphes of Gods Revenge against the Cryinge, & Execrable Sinne of (Willfull & Premeditated) Murther, expressed in Thirtye Severall, Tragicall Historyes (Digested into Six Books)* in G. Whalley and H.J. Jackson (eds.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 12 (in 6 parts): *Marginalia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980–2001), part 1, pp. 237–8.

[42] Ibid., p. 238.

[43] T. De Quincey, *On Murder*, ed. R. Morrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 8.

to God's Revenge upon Murder, by Reynolds ... Sometimes, perhaps, he might read in the Newgate Calendar down to the year 1788, but he never looked into a book more recent.'[44]

Alongside what Robert Morrison calls De Quincey's 'satirical high jinks', notably on the 'commodification of violence' evident in contemporary society, we also enter an 'exhilarating and disorientating world of irony and aesthetics' in the 'Murder' essays.[45] In them we can enjoy, in the Coleridgean manner, a good murder and, in particular, what George Orwell once called 'the murders which have given the greatest amount of pleasure to the British public'.[46] De Quincey, unlike Toad in the Hole, sees the epitome of the terror and sublimity of murder evident in the Ratcliffe Highway murders of 1811, where the alleged perpetrator, John Williams, killed four people (a young family and the father's apprentice) in one evening. Williams may not have eaten child flesh, but he went so far as to cut the throat of a three-month-old baby and in so doing created a taste for sensational murder. 'Mr Williams', writes De Quincey, 'has exalted the ideal of murder to all of us ... Like ... Milton in poetry, like Michael Angelo in painting, he has carried his art to a point of colossal sublimity; and, as Mr Wordsworth observes, has in a manner "created the taste by which he is to be enjoyed".'[47] De Quincey, like Swift before him, walks the line between Grand Guignol and drollery, and in the 1854 'Sequel' to his 1827 essay on murder he characterises this as a 'playfulness', the place where the Gothic meets the comic: 'it is amongst the direct purposes ... of this *bagatelle* to graze the brink of horror, and of all that would in actual realisation be most repulsive'.[48] De Quincey admired Edmund Burke greatly and he is here at his most Burkean; terror at second hand has a macabre and compelling fascination.

In the final essay on murder, De Quincey's persona runs for Swiftian cover in the face of accusations of dubious taste, the 'Modest Proposal' being a kind of literary shield of Ajax: 'If ... any man thinks it worth his while to tilt against ... this lecture on the aesthetics of murder, I shelter myself for the moment under the Telamonian shield of the Dean.'[49] That said, De Quincey eventually distances himself from the Dean, saying that his 'own little paper may plead a privileged excuse for its extravagance ... altogether wanting to the Dean's. Nobody can pretend ... that there is any ... natural tendency in

[44] Ibid., p. 85. [45] R. Morrison, Introduction to De Quincey, *On Murder*, p. xv.
[46] G. Orwell, 'The decline of the English murder' in S. Collini (ed.), *George Orwell: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 205.
[47] De Quincey, *On Murder*, p. 10. [48] Ibid., p. 96. [49] Ibid., p. 95.

human thoughts, which could ever turn to infants as articles of diet.'[50] But, in reality, 'after we have paid our tribute of regret' to a sublime happening – a fire, even a murder – there is a common human tendency to aestheticise it: 'we go on to consider it' as a sort of 'stage spectacle'.[51] De Quincey is right to draw a distinction between himself and Swift: while Swift's comedy forces us to look in the eye of the repulsive and terrible, De Quincey's form of aestheticisation serves to distance.

A Satire of Ideas in a Parody of Ages

The potency in the comic parody of the satirical dissertation (such as Swift's essay) is also evident in Thomas Love Peacock's literary-critical tour de force, 'The Four Ages of Poetry' (1820), one of the great triumphs of the satirical essay in the Romantic period. The essay was published in the first – and only – number of the publishers Charles and James Ollier's *Literary Miscellany* in June or July 1820. The Olliers had been, as Peacock well knew, publishers of his friend Percy Bysshe Shelley from 1817 onwards, and the 'Four Ages' famously prompted Shelley's riposte, 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821).

Peacock's 'Four Ages of Poetry' is a mock-treatise that sets out the progress of verse from ancient times to the 1820s and is delivered in the know-all voice adopted by both De Quincey and Swift. This is very far from being a Whig history, inasmuch as Peacock sees the progress of poetry as one of decline. 'The first, or iron age of poetry', he maintains, is panegyrising 'ruder chiefs'.[52] 'The golden age of poetry', however, exemplified in the work of Homer, 'finds its materials in the age of iron.' ('This age begins when poetry begins to be retrospective.')[53] But the golden age represents a pyrrhic victory, as 'Poetry has now attained its perfection: it has attained the point which it cannot pass: with the progress of reason and civilisation, facts become more interesting than fiction.' 'Then comes the silver age, or the poetry of civilised life.'[54] The age of brass, encapsulated by Nonnus in Roman times, follows, 'which, by rejecting the polish and the learning of the age of silver, and taking a retrograde stride to the barbarisms and crude traditions of the age of iron, professes to return to nature and revive the age of gold'.[55] Peacock sees an exact parallel between the progress of poetry in

[50] Ibid., p. 96. [51] Ibid.
[52] T.L. Peacock, 'The Four Ages of Poetry' in H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones (eds.), *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, 10 vols. (London: Constable, 1924–34), vol. 8, p. 3.
[53] Ibid., p. 6. [54] Ibid. [55] Ibid., p. 10.

ancient times and in the modern age. The iron age of Arthurian romance leads to 'the greatest of English poets, Milton'. After that, 'The silver age succeeded; beginning with Dryden, coming to perfection with Pope, and ending with Goldsmith, Collins, and Gray.'[56]

The narrative is not that far from that in the 'Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*', the critical difference being that what succeeds the Augustans is, in Peacock's account, 'the second childhood of poetry'.[57] The notion of the Lake Poets as infantile, their 'language not simple, but puerile' as Lord Byron has it in his review of William Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), was not new in 1820, but Peacock's was the most notable articulation of this idea in the form of a satirical essay. Peacock's encapsulation of Wordsworthian literary theory is astute verbatim parody, not seeking to exaggerate for satirical effect:

> Poetical genius is the finest of all things, and we feel that we have more of it than any one ever had. The way to bring it to perfection is to cultivate poetical impressions exclusively. Poetical impressions can be received only among natural scenes: for all that is artificial is anti-poetical. Society is artificial, therefore we will live out of society. The mountains are natural, therefore we will live in the mountains.[58]

Peacock's satire is smart in that this is no burning of straw men; his *reductio ad absurdum* is not based on caricature but on the internal logic of the Lakers' position. And Peacock shares the view of contemporary parodic versions of Wordsworth (J.H. Reynolds, Lord Byron) about the conceit of the poet's solipsistic conceitedness. At the same time, as well as satirising, Peacock actually sees what Romanticism offers; as per more orthodox literary criticism, he sees this as offering something new: 'They wrote verses on a new principle; saw rocks and rivers in a new light; and remain studiously ignorant of history, society, and human nature.'[59] Peacock here is a poet who sees no good in contemporary poetry, who endorses a kind of gleeful utilitarianism, and who as a melancholic attacks contemporary forms of his own malaise.

One of Peacock's finest critics, Marilyn Butler, has argued that Peacock's 'desired idea' in both the 'Four Ages' and his satirical novels is 'a campaigning literature of ideas'.[60] He was the perfect example of Butler's own critical methodology: her scepticism about the Romantic ideology and, simultaneously, her deep engagement with it. This was Peacock's *modus vivendi*.

[56] Ibid., p. 11. [57] Ibid., p. 13. [58] Ibid. [59] Ibid.
[60] M. Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 280.

Butler sees the 'Four Ages' as 'a comic vehicle containing a wholly serious purpose', that of taking on the affectations of modern poetry.[61] Peacock of course was well aware of the literary genre of satire, which can be summed up in the concept of comedy with a moral purpose, and his satirical writing spanned more than five decades. The 'Four Ages' is partial testimony to Peacock's sustained engagement with Romantic solipsism, gloomy affectations, and supposed infantilism, and likewise testimony to contemporary poetry's conscious avoidance, to Peacock's mind, of the world of reality.

Peacock's essay offers sharp satire on the new 'patriarchs of the age of brass', but it also demonstrates a very close intellectual engagement with them:

> Mr Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd [and] strings them into an epic. Mr Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons; and Mr Coleridge, to the valuable information acquired from similar sources, superadds the dreams of crazy theologians and the mysticisms of German metaphysics.[62]

The comedy here is not the *reductio ad absurdum* used earlier in Peacock's essay and so frequently used in the satirical essay, as per the Edgeworths; rather, it offers an accurate account of Romantic narrative poetry with only a small frame of caricature, but wrapped in a frame of sarcasm and vitriol about the 'degenerate fry of modern rhymesters', who have forgotten that there is more to life than poetry and who 'continue to debate and promulgate oracles about poetry, as if it were still what it was in the Homeric age, the all-in-all of intellectual progression . . . as if there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians, and political economists'.[63]

'The Four Ages of Poetry' prompted M.H. Abrams to an analysis that has a wider significance in terms of the elusive nature of the best satirical essays: Peacock was 'a poet who mocked at poets from a Utilitarian frame of satirical reference . . . a Utilitarian who turned into ridicule the belief in utility and the march of intellect . . . a critic who derided the contemners of poetry, after having himself derided the poetry they condemned'.[64] This imperturbable satirical having of one's cake and eating it is shared by some of the most notable satirical prose writers. Peacock and De Quincey, like Swift before

[61] Ibid., p. 286. [62] Peacock, 'The Four Ages of Poetry', p. 15. [63] Ibid.
[64] M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 126.

them, have something of a verbal swagger about them; here the satirical essay is possessed of a performative aspect – 'look-at-my-brilliance', so to speak. Peacock showed a lifelong nose-thumbing of idealism wherever he found it, even – especially – among his friends. Where Coleridge longed to see 'something great – something one & indivisible',[65] the Romantic-era satirical essayists, as per Charles Lamb's dark essay 'Imperfect Sympathies' (1821), are rather more 'content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth'.[66] The satirical essay, with its ambiguities and ironies, is an appropriate form for such a declaration.

Elia, like his satirical peers and predecessors, 'cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath'.[67] The narrow minded, in this essay represented by the Caledonian intellect, sees only black and white – 'there can be but a right and a wrong'.[68] 'Above all', declares Lamb, 'you must beware of indirect expressions before a Caledonian. Clap an extinguisher upon your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it. Remember you are upon your oath.'[69] Quasi-methodical presentation in the satirical essay, on the other hand, in Swift and his successors, gestures towards right and wrong but never quite arrives; its ironic posture leaves the reader in what Lamb celebrates as the 'twilight of dubiety'.[70]

One of the most notable English essays, Francis Bacon's 'Of Truth' (1625), begins by interrogating its own subject in the voice of a familiar grim jest: '"What is truth?" said jesting Pilate.'[71] 'Certainly, there be that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief', Bacon continues, and 'though the sects of philosophers of that kind be gone, yet there remain certain discoursing wits which are of the same veins.'[72] Though the ancient sceptics who doubted the essentiality of truth are no more, the 'discoursing wits' of the satirical essay, with their 'delight in giddiness' – irony, complexity, pleasure in rhetorical ingenuity – possess something of their spirit.

[65] S.T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E.L. Griggs, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–9), vol. 1, p. 350.
[66] C. Lamb, 'Imperfect sympathies' in E. V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 59.
[67] Ibid., vol. 2, p. 59. [68] Ibid. [69] Ibid. [70] Ibid.
[71] F. Bacon, *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, ed. B. Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 3.
[72] Ibid.

17

Food and the Essay

AMY L. TIGNER

Food has played an important and under-explored role in the development of the essay, both at the level of content (the essayist has often thematised cooking and eating) and of form (theorists of the essay since Michel de Montaigne have invoked delectation, rumination, and digestion with a frequency that may be unique in literary commentary). The relationship between the essay and food belongs to a history coupling literal and literary taste: 'Some books are meant to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested', as Francis Bacon proclaims in 'Of Studies'.[1] For Bacon, here, tasting is metaphorical; however, other authors conjoin food and the essay with physical consumption and enjoyment, ideas that inform our sense of the essay as both a journalistic and critical form.

The gastronomic essay emerged in France around the turn of the nineteenth century, but this chapter sets the stage earlier, with Montaigne's *Essais* (1580), in which the author advocates that sensual appetite and individual taste should eclipse any prescribed regimen of health.[2] Essayistic food writing of the two centuries that followed primarily appeared in association with food production, as in prefaces to cookbooks and manuals concerning carving, distilling, and other kitchen skills. However, with the essays of the *Almanach des gourmands* (1803–12) by Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de La Reynière (known as Grimod) and the subsequent essayistic work of Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût* (1826), writing about food without making recipes the main event became fashionable, shifting attention from the kitchen to the dining table, and from the chef to the connoisseur.

I would like to thank Denise Gigante for her suggestions and for the attentive editing of this chapter. The writing is all the better for her work; any error remains mine.

[1] F. Bacon, *The Major Works*, ed. B. Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 439.

[2] See 'Of experience' in M. Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 814–57.

Employing literary tropes such as persona, mise en scène, and anecdote, gastronomy as an essayistic genre walked the line between social critique and creative non-fiction.[3] From the onset, the food essayist variously acquired the voice of the belligerent controversialist, the satirist, the hedonist, the didact who emerged in conduct manuals, the critic, judge, or connoisseur – at once chiding bourgeois readers' patterns of consumption, while simultaneously encouraging their corporeal appetites and culinary interest. Gastronomy's sororal art has always been satire, which in itself may be a cooking term, since the later form of the Latin *satur* means 'medley', and Juvenal called satire an *ollapodrida* (literally a decaying pot, but used to denote a mixed pot of vegetables and meats).[4] The literary potpourri of gastronomy and satire came to characterise future food essays, as the genre expanded beyond France.

The British were among the first to discover the literary potential of gastronomy and the essayistic genre, as two major strands emerged. The first involved essayists who eschewed the connection between the connoisseur and the chef, valuing critique above cooking in the form of restaurant and food book reviews, food-inflected literary criticism, and so forth; the second integrated the gastronomical with the culinary on the side of production, often in the form of prefaces to cookbooks, essays on culinary chemistry, etc. In the latter category, Dr William Kitchiner (a real name) began *The Cook's Oracle* (1817) with an essay in the style (and often words) of gastronomy's French founder, Grimod. Others involved gastronomy in cultural critique, including the pseudonymous Launcelot Sturgeon in *Essays, Moral, Philosophical, and Stomachical* (1822); Charles Lamb (or Elia) in 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' (1822); and William Makepeace Thackeray in 'Dining-Out Snobs' (1847).[5] By the end of the nineteenth century, women had entered the fray beyond the cookbook. Elizabeth Robins Pennell, whose food essays appeared in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, produced literary narratives of recipes, adopting the tone of the gastronomic connoisseur (a stance dominated by men), while legitimising herself within the traditionally female realm (in the British tradition) of recipe writing.[6] Her recipes were not recipes at all, but

[3] See A.L. Tigner and A. Carruth, 'Authoring gastronomy' in *Literature and Food Studies*, ed. Tigner and Carruth (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 136–67.

[4] See 'satire' in J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, revised by C.E. Preston (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 780.

[5] For a selection of these writers, see D. Gigante (ed.), *Gusto: Essential Writings in Nineteenth-Century Gastronomy* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[6] For more about the distinction between French male chefs and English female cooks, see S. Mennell, *All Manners of Food* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 201–4.

vague instructions that transform into lavish metaphors. Whichever approach it may have taken, the essay became *the* vehicle for journalistic food writing.

The French Origins of Essayistic Gastronomy

Essayistic writing about food originated with the ancients, but Montaigne turned his thoughts to subjective bodily experience in 'Of Experience'. Rather than following the prevalent Galenic practice of deferring to a doctor's dietary regime, he maintained that an individual should pursue the dictates of his own body, based on corporeal knowledge gained through empirical experience. He argued that one should follow one's individual taste in determining what, when, and how to consume food, rather than enslaving oneself to expert opinion of diet and health. Eating, for Montaigne, was a practice in which one should redirect attention from what others prescribed to what one judged for oneself, an approach at the heart of all his essays. For, at their very foundation, Montaigne's essays are about judgment or taste.

The words '*gouster*' (taste) and '*essai*', which occur together in a sentence near the end of 'Of Experience', are etymological siblings. As Victoria Kahn points out, the word 'essai' stems from the original Latin word *exagium* (meaning 'weighing', 'weight', or 'balance') and has a primary definition of signifying judgment, attempt, or trial. The second definition turns explicitly to food and to taste, especially in the context of tasting the king's food.[7] One must taste in order to judge; and the art of essay writing, which has in its name the injunction to assay the world by means of one's own judgment, relies especially on taste. The sensation of taste requires taking outside substances into our bodies and is perhaps the most visceral way in which we experience the world. For Montaigne, the thought processes necessary for the experiments he called essays require the same 'ruminations' and 'digestions' that accompany the eating process. As David B. Goldstein argues, 'Montaigne's emphasis on eating in "Of Experience" is ... a fundamental way of exploring how knowledge derives from body as well as mind. The central question that the food in the essay raises is why eating is so important to the issue of experiential knowledge.'[8] In essence, Montaigne turned the somatic experience of eating into the intellectual practice of essay writing

[7] V. Kahn, 'The sense of taste in Montaigne's *Essais*', *Modern Language Notes*, 95:5 (1980), 1269.
[8] D.B. Goldstein, 'Eats well with others: culinary skepticism in *As you Like It* and Montaigne's "Of experience"', *Criticism*, 59:4 (2017), 651–2.

two centuries before the gastronomical practice of writing food essays began to flourish.

The French Revolution (1789–99), in giving rise to the restaurant, gave rise to the food essay as, originally, a restaurant review, and with it the wider field of gastronomy. The new egalitarian culture born of revolution provided the bourgeoisie with access to what had previously been the exclusive purview of the nobility: haute cuisine. Such access necessitated culinary education and guidance for new consumers. In its first instantiation in the 1740s, the restaurant was a purlieu in which eighteenth-century elites could consume a restorative bouillon broth, literally a *restaurant*, to cure any weakness of the body. Following Galenic philosophy, in which each person requires different and individual remedies to balance their humours, the first restaurants offered a variety of broths and then began providing accompanying dishes suited to the individual's constitution.[9] This notion of cooking for individual taste drew the interest of elite chefs who precipitated the metamorphosis of the restaurant into a site of discretionary fine dining, originally around the Palais-Royal in Paris. Dishes that had catered to the specific requirements of sickly, highly sensitive individuals became options for a wider public to satisfy its appetites and, more importantly, to refine them into taste.

Questions of what constituted correct taste and how it might be procured inspired manuals of instruction that taught how, where, and what to eat and that formed part of the modern essayistic genre of gastronomical writing. The frisson about new, discriminatory food establishments ushered in discourse about restaurants, eating, and how to become a gourmand, or what we might call a gourmet. The essays of the literary and theatrical critic Alexandre-Balthazar Laurent Grimod de La Reynière adopted the convention of a 'tasting jury', a gastronomical Spectator's Club, of sorts, devoted to food, which deliberated the various merits of cuisine and dining experience. Grimod published the results of these tasting sessions with his club of connoisseurs – *séances*, he called them – in the first volume of his journal, *Almanach des gourmands* (1803). With new forms of food and food practice (dining, carving, hosting) encroaching on the realm of high art, the strain of critical writing based upon them was quirky, witty, and at times even acerbic. The posthumous publication in 1826 of Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût* (The Physiology of Taste), a gastronomic hodgepodge or

[9] See R.L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 76.

miscellany of aphorisms, dialogues, meditations, tales, recipes, and anecdotes, brought together in one volume many of the principles of gastronomic taste of Grimod and others. Brillat-Savarin and Grimod were writing around the same time, and the latter extended what for Grimod was an exclusive practice to the bourgeoisie, hungry for access to the codes of connoisseurship that bespoke taste.

As much as Grimod disparaged the old guard of the aristocracy, he was born of that class, and his voice retained a superiority that denigrated what he saw as the presumption of middle-class pretenders. *Au contraire*, Brillat-Savarin, an attorney from the aptly named town of Belley, and a politician whose work brought him to Paris, addressed his readers as equals. Speaking more democratically, he believed that literary taste begat gastronomical taste, that one needed only to subscribe to the words of the gourmand to ascertain how to become one. As Priscilla Ferguson observes, 'To the paradigm of chef-diner Brillat-Savarin added the reader, the consumer for whom the cultural rather than the material product is the primary concern, ... [thus placing] gastronomy within the larger intellectual and social universe.'[10] Moving beyond Grimod's emphasis on particular dishes as taste-objects, Brillat-Savarin composed a text that he carried with him to meals, his practice of essayistic food writing almost trumping the food itself. As Allison Carruth writes, 'the cultural status of gastronomic authors inheres at once in the ephemeral pleasure they re-create for readers and in the rigor they embody through turning transient acts of eating into lasting literary works'.[11] The social and intellectual aspects of Brillat-Savarin's essayistic gastronomical classic would influence later generations of food writers, especially insofar as he vouched a philosophy as well as physiology of taste. In what Ferguson calls gastronomical 'taste communities', the connoisseur viewed food as an appropriate topic for the art of judgment and literary creativity.[12]

The British Epicures

Inspired by the epicurean essays of Grimod de La Reynière, Dr William Kitchiner was one of the first British writers to popularise gastronomy in a nation not known for food artistry. Independently wealthy and self-educated,

[10] P.P. Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 96–7.
[11] A. Carruth, 'Modernism and gastronomy' in J.M. Coghlan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 90.
[12] Ibid., p. 97.

he was renowned in the fields of music, optical lenses, culinary chemistry, and gastronomy. He commenced his first cookbook, *Apicius Redivivus; or, The Cook's Oracle* (1817), with an essay in the style of the *Almanach des gourmands*.[13] Clearly influenced by Grimod's tasting jury, he claimed to have assembled 'an enlightened and indefatigable "Committee Of Taste," (composed of thoroughbred Grands Gourmands of the first magnitude)', who had tested all of the dishes in his book.[14] Kitchiner turned to the recipe as his fundamental for writing, revolutionising the recipe book by taking a narrative approach to his writing and a scientific approach to the art of cooking. From the perspective of the gastronomical empiricist, Kitchiner explains that 'My Receipts are the results of experiments carefully made.'[15] His tasting committee, moreover, came with the knowledge and sensibility requisite to the art of judgment.

Kitchiner's multiplying gastronomical prefaces to *The Cook's Oracle* in the many editions of the book differentiate between two distinct audiences: male connoisseurs who will consume and judge the dishes and female cooks who will use his recipes. To his fraternity of bons-vivants he adopted a jocular tone and was full of conviviality, cajoling them with 'humorous eccentricity'.[16] His opening essay advises the epicure that 'The Master, who wishes to enjoy the rare luxury of a table regularly well served in the best style, must treat his Cook as his friend – watch over her health with the tenderest care.'[17] It is hard to judge the degree of irony in the note connected to this statement, suggesting that the epicure give his cook at least one-hundredth a part of the attention he would give his horse or hound, taking care also (in the case of the cook) 'to regulate her animal system'.[18] Kitchiner at once assumes the subservience of the British underclass and the female gender, even while extolling the worth of their culinary artistry. Expecting competence and literacy on the part of such cooks, he presumes that they would be reading his cookbook, since 'a Complete Cook must know how to go to Market, write legibly, and keep Accounts accurately'.[19] Such precision would also assure that his recipes would result in dishes that turned out precisely as

[13] W. Kitchiner, *The Cook's Oracle* (London: J. & J. Harper, 1831), pp. 15–38 (title abbreviated in second edition).
[14] Ibid., p. 17; see also D. Gigante, 'Good taste, good food, and the gastronome' in G.G. Shahani (ed.), *Food and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 98–114.
[15] Kitchiner, *Cook's Oracle*, p. 17.
[16] K. Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain Through its Cooking* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 262.
[17] Kitchiner, *Cook's Oracle*, p. 28. [18] Ibid., p. 28 n. [19] Ibid., p. 35.

prescribed. Kitchiner himself worked in the kitchen, following his own recipes with exactitude, recipes designed mainly for female cooks, and his scientific methodology would influence the most famous English cookbook writer of the nineteenth century, Mrs Isabella Beeton. With regard to tasting, however, Kitchiner addressed the male epicure (the preferred term in English, contemporary with Grimod's version of gourmand). Whereas as a scientist he instructs the female cook with accurate measurements and instructions, as a gastronome he speaks to the male connoisseur in the essayistic writing surrounding his recipes.

As much as Kitchiner followed the French gastronomes in yoking the experiences of the gourmand to the science of the recipe, many British epicures remained aloof to the production side of food, preferring to treat gastronomy purely as a discourse of connoisseurship and satire. As Brian Rejack notes, food during the late Romantic period emerged 'both as figure for and metonymic marker of literary taste'.[20] Leigh Hunt presents, in the first essay of 'The Round Table', a serial column based on the premise of a literary club that met weekly – in the manner of Grimod's tasting jury or the English Beefsteak Club, perhaps even more than of Arthur and his feasting knights – to confer upon 'the merits of a leg of mutton, and of the subjects upon which we are to write'.[21] From the conversations at his democratic Round Table (where hierarchy is less easy to discern), Hunt and his Lancelot (William Hazlitt) produced a series of essays that satirised conservative values and that won them the title of the 'Leg of Mutton School of Poetry'.[22] In the same series, Hazlitt published 'On Gusto' (1816), which defined the word 'gusto' solely through the fields of art and literature, not mentioning food at all (with the possible exception of a nod to Rabelais). Yet that essay, as Denise Gigante observes, 'gave a name to the new aesthetic', and the word came to be associated closely with gastronomy. (The word *gusto*, cousin to the French *goût*, means 'taste', as in Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût*.)[23]

[20] B. Rejack, '*Blackwood's Magazine* and the "Schooling of Taste"', *European Romantic Review*, 24:6 (2013), 724; see also D. Gigante, 'The Romantic revolution in taste' in Coghlan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, pp. 44–57.

[21] L. Hunt, 'The Round Table no. 1', *Examiner*, 366 (1 January 1815), 12.

[22] Anon. [J. Wilson, J.G. Lockhart, or W. Maginn], 'The leg of mutton school of poetry', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 9 (1821), 345–50.

[23] D. Gigante, 'The lost gastronomers' in N. Lennartz (ed.), *The Lost Romantics: Forgotten Poets, Neglected Works, and One-Hit Wonders* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, 2020), p. 267. For more about the meaning of 'taste', see D. Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 1–21.

The kinship between gusto and *goût* links Hunt and Hazlitt's literary club to the phenomenon of the dining club, but their insistence on the more inclusive principles of a round table, forswearing the hierarchy of high and low, triggered the pundits at *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, where writing under the pseudonym *'Z'*, John Gibson Lockhart flayed Hunt as a man 'of little education' and, more damningly, of 'exquisitely bad taste'.[24] 'Food discourse', as Rejack points out, 'offers a way to "school" tastes through the logic of naturalized aesthetic standards, even as it also reveals a materially dependent structuring of taste performed in and through periodicals.'[25] Gastronomical rhetoric, in other words, mushroomed into a culture war fought in the periodicals with food as the barometer of taste and class.

Unlike the French gastronomers, British epicurean essayists tended to write anonymously, under pseudonyms typically alimentary in nature.[26] Often, food functioned only metaphorically as social commentary. Most notable, perhaps, in the 1820s was Launcelot Sturgeon, whose Arthurial first name and fishy last name served to heighten the sardonic quality of his *Essays, Moral, Philosophical, and Stomachical* (1822). As Gigante has convincingly argued, 'Launcelot Sturgeon is most likely one of the divers noms de plume belonging to Charles Lamb.'[27] She cites the metaphorical significance of the pig in both of their writings and asks: 'seen through the perspective of pig, ... could Sturgeon, that noble fish, have been anything other than a Lamb?'[28] Certainly, the pseudonym connects the author to Hunt's Round Table, and the name is also a pun, as the author 'lances a lot' at the various fish he wishes to fry.[29] (Sturgeon's eggy offspring, caviar, figures as a choice hors d'oeuvre in an earlier literary text famed for gourmandising and satire: Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, which contains one of the earliest literary references to caviar.[30])

Providing a piscine pseudo-ancestry, Sturgeon reveals that his father belonged to the 'Fishmonger's Company', had been a 'deputy for the ward

[24] [J.G. Lockhart,] 'On the Cockney School of poetry' No. I, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2:7 (October 1817), 38.
[25] Rejack, '*Blackwood's Magazine* and the "Schooling of Taste"', 724.
[26] See Gigante, 'Lost gastronomers', p. 265.
[27] D. Gigante, 'Who was Launcelot Sturgeon?', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 166 (Autumn 2017), 19; see also Gigante, 'Lost gastronomers', p. 266.
[28] Gigante, 'Who was Launcelot Sturgeon?', 19.
[29] Gigante discusses how Sturgeon was sympathetic to the Cockney writers and was likewise criticised anonymously in *The Literary Gazette* for his 'revolution in taste'; 'Lost gastronomers', pp. 267–8.
[30] F. Rabelais, *Pantagruel* in D.M. Frame (ed.), *The Complete Works of François Rabelais* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 477 (book 4, ch. 18).

of Port-soken', and finally died from overeating 'gloriously on the field of honour ... at a Lord Mayor's feast'.[31] And, like the fish that Sturgeon remarks 'should swim three times – in water – in sauce, and in wine', Sturgeon senior seems to have been thoroughly sauced by wine – or 'soaked' in port.[32] Even though his father had a passion for all things gustatory, Sturgeon discloses that his own culinary knowledge originates not patrilineally, but experientially from his time spent dining in Paris – and reading Grimod's *Almanach des gourmands*. Indeed, Sturgeon incorporates sections of, or even whole essays from, the *Almanach*, transmuting French gastronomy to English epicurean taste, with its own wry twists.

Perhaps the most British of Sturgeon's essays is 'On Roasting Beef, Including Considerations on its Domestic and National Importance with an Entire Plan for Its Improvement', an essay that does not originate with Grimod. Although Sturgeon frequently champions French cuisine, 'On Roasting Beef' propounds the English diet, for the English, like Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, are 'great eater[s] of beef'.[33] For Sturgeon, 'the national character is involved in that of our beef; and not only our love, but our pride also'.[34] Although he provides a description of how to roast beef, it can hardly be said to be a recipe. Ironically, near the end of the essay, he reveals that this method of beef preparation, much to his regret, is not really English at all, but rather 'the merit of the [recipe's] discovery belongs to France'.[35] Sturgeon's ending (and perhaps the whole essay) alludes to William Hogarth's satirical painting, *The Gate of Calais or O, the Roast Beef of Old England* (1748), which lampoons the French with a culinary symbol of British power, a huge side of roast beef.[36] Both Hogarth and Sturgeon refer to Henry Fielding's 1731 'The Roast Beef of Old England', a song that disparages Englishmen's abstinence from eating their own strengthening beef in favour of the 'ragouts' of France, and that argues for a return to this hearty British fare.

Given such allusions, irony characterises Sturgeon's essay – and his *Essays* as a whole. For while he espouses French gastronomy, he simultaneously disparages the French way of cooking – at least of roast beef. The essay closes by mentioning a 'slight inconvenience', as the recipe will 'scarcely suffice for a half a dozen men of moderate appetite', making it useless for such British

[31] Sturgeon quoted in Gigante (ed.), *Gusto*, p. 84. [32] Ibid., p. 87.
[33] W. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (1.3.72–3) in S. Greenblatt, et al. (eds.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 1772.
[34] Sturgeon quoted in Gigante (ed.), *Gusto*, p. 102. [35] Ibid., p. 103.
[36] E. Einberg, *Hogarth the Painter* (London: Tate Gallery, 1997), pp. 48–9.

tasting juries as one may find assembled at a Lord Mayor's Banquet.[37] As is typical of the gastronomical essay, Sturgeon's cuts (perhaps carves) both ways: he inveigles the English reader to devour Gallic gastronomic precepts, while skewering the French.

If what we witness in Sturgeon is his quibble with the French, if not French gastronomy, Charles Lamb, writing under the persona of Elia (among other things, a possible allusion to Elijah), published his satiric essay 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' (1822) as a commentary both on epicurean writing and edacious gourmandising. As Gigante asserts, 'Lamb's '"Dissertation Upon Roast Pig" is in many ways the finest fictional critique of taste in the Romantic era, and into it a masochistic fascination with the arts of carving, cookery, and culinary animal tortures reveals an epicurean cruelty as the condition of possibility for what Lamb labels "low-Urban Taste".'[38] Highlighting grotesque and violent details of animal consumption, Lamb reveals a kind of disgust and perhaps even self-loathing associated with carnivorous eating in a postlapsarian world.

Rather than beginning with the Fall from Eden, wherein the human diet allegedly changed from vegetarian to omnivorous, Elia commences with an origin tale from China. Yet, the essay reveals its parodic intent from the first sentence of the absurd fable: 'Mankind, says a Chinese manuscript, which my friend M. was obliging enough to read and explain to me, for the first seventy thousand ages ate their meat raw, clawing or biting it from the living animal, just as they do in Abyssinia to this day.'[39] A fable coming from a supposed Chinese manuscript, the tale at the centre of Lamb's essay alludes to the long tradition of Chinese gastronomy, which dates from the eighth century, but also to the contemporary fashion for all things oriental, from porcelain jars to lacquer panels. The tale quickly moves from this image of the elite Chinese gastronomer, penning his tale in calligraphy, to the humble Chinese pig farmer Ho-ti and his lumbering and irresponsible son Bo-bo (a name that suggests 'barbarian'). One day when Ho-ti is away from home, Bo-bo, a fire-bug extraordinaire, accidentally sets fire to their cottage and a litter of nine piglets. Horrified at his actions, he touches the burnt pigs for signs of life. Scorching his fingers on their charred flesh, he licks them and discovers the delights of roast pig, initiating a taste for cooked pork that flames through the country.

[37] Sturgeon quoted in Gigante (ed.), *Gusto*, p. 103. [38] Gigante, *Taste*, p. 90.
[39] C. Lamb, 'A dissertation upon roast pig' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Complete Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 312.

Although Elia's story alleges to be from the Far East, the tale descends from the myth of Prometheus, which Percy Bysshe Shelley appropriates as a fable of cooking and meat eating in *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813): 'Prometheus, (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the condition of his nature and applied fire to culinary purposes; thus inventing the horror of the shambles.'[40] From this very moment, as punishment for his audacity, Prometheus's 'vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease', and thus Shelley makes an argument for leaving off disease-causing meat for a healthful vegetarian diet.[41] With satirical hyperbole, Elia's declamation of his own predilection for 'young and tender suckling' pigs that sacrifice themselves for his appetite references Shelley, but also alludes to extravagant European food utopias, from Rabelais to Ben Jonson, in which animal self-sacrifice creates an abundant 'Land of Cockaigne'. Jonson declares in 'To Penshurst' (1611) that 'The painted partridge lies in every field, / And for thy mess is willing to be killed' and that 'Fat aged carps . . . run into thy net'.[42] For his part, Elia's suckling pig is 'content to die' in a 'fair sepulchre in the grateful stomach of the judicious epicure'.[43] Elia identifies with the innocence of the young pig, calling the male-gendered animal a 'child-pig' and saying that his 'voice as yet not broken but [is] something between a childish treble, and a grumble'.[44]

The vinculum between piglet and human child draws on earlier essays of political satire: Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals' (c. 1580) and Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' (1729). These predecessors target specific political agendas and speak pointedly to the practices of particular factions: Montaigne and European religious wars, and Swift and Britain's treatment of the Irish.[45] Lamb's essay critiques the epicurean aesthetics of Romantic gastronomy, but also takes on the human condition and conundrum of eating more generally. Elia's extravagant language of enjoyment at the expense of animal pain problematises the act of flesh-eating, as it was called in a dietary discourse that would influence later food writers.[46]

[40] The essay was first published as a note to *Queen Mab* in 1813 and then separately as a pamphlet. Here, P.B. Shelley, *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (London: J. Pitman, 1884), p. 10.
[41] Ibid., pp. 10–11; see also Tigner and Carruth, 'Authoring gastronomy', pp. 63–6.
[42] B. Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford, P. Simpson, and E. Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–63), vol. 8, 'To Penshurst', ll. 29–30, 33.
[43] Lamb, 'A dissertation upon roast pig', p. 321.
[44] Ibid., p. 319.
[45] For more on Swiftian satire in the context of the essay, see J. Strachan's 'Satire and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 16).
[46] Carruth, 'Modernism and gastronomy', pp. 88–100.

Although published some twenty years after the gastronomic and literary culture wars of *The Examiner* and *Blackwood's*, Thackeray's satirical essays, published serially in *Punch* from 1846 to 1847 and collected in *The Book of Snobs* (1848), carried on the warfare. Targeting snobs in their many varieties, including military, clerical, royal, country, literary, club snobs and more, Thackeray takes to task the highbrow pretentiousness of Victorian culture. A couple of the essays appraise food snobs, specifically 'Dining-Out Snobs' and 'Dinner-Giving Snobs'. Thackeray, following Grimod's gastronomical writings, makes fun of hosts as well as guests, those who try to show off taste when they don't really have it and those who sneer at their hosts' ill-prepared fare, revealing their lack of taste.[47]

Part of what makes the satire both funny and digestible is that Thackeray (or at least his first-person narrator) includes himself in the role of a snob, a rhetorical move that is typical of the gastronomic genre. As Frank Palmeri observes, Thackeray's 'Snob' essays make plain that they are 'written by one of themselves, and such an admission can strengthen the satire by implying the involvement of the author and the generality of the condition'.[48] Casting himself as a guest, or dining-out snob, Thackeray lambasts the multitude of middle-class, dinner-giving snobs, who can ill afford to provide a good meal to refined guests. Any extremity of hospitality is snobbish: 'Stinginess is snobbish. Ostentation is snobbish. Too great profusion is snobbish. Tuft-hunting is snobbish.'[49] If one is too frugal or too lavish, one is a snob; whether one attempts a great show or denies one's guest, one is acting out of the bounds of taste that adapts itself to its station.

Thackeray's rhetorical modus operandi throughout the essay is that of exaggeration and augmentation, which leads to an effect of comic critique familiar to the satiric essay. His 'Dining-Out Snobs' demonstrates by droll hyperbole that the greater snob is not the one who tries to impress his guest with what he can hardly afford, but the dining-out snob who rails mean-spiritedly against his tasteless host. The more the narrator critiques his hosts, the more the reader recognises the irony of such criticism, allowing Thackeray to turn the table upon himself in a manner familiar to the gastronomical essayist. As Jonathan Swift once explained, 'Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their

[47] Thackeray harks back to Grimod's essay 'On hosts'. See Gigante (ed.), *Gusto*, pp. 4–8.
[48] F. Palmeri, 'Cruikshank, Thackeray, and the Victorian eclipse of satire', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 44:4 (2004), 767.
[49] Thackeray quoted in Gigante (ed.), *Gusto*, p. 226.

own, which is the chief reason for that kind of reception it meets in the world and that so few are offended with it.'[50] In Thackeray's gastronomic essays, the dinner-giving and dining-out snobs, however recognisable as types, remain at a distance from the reader, while the essayist acknowledges his affiliation with them through the slippery, tongue-in-cheek style of the gastronomer-gourmand who is at once a connoisseur and a glutton.

Women and Gastronomy

Although women, beginning with Hannah Woolley in 1661, had been publishing cookery books in Britain, it was not until the late nineteenth century that a woman, Elizabeth Robins Pennell, stepped *in propria persona* into the male-dominated field of gastronomy. Like Hunt in his 'Round Table' papers advocating the gastronomical pleasures of the humble leg of mutton, Pennell entered the melee to assert a woman's voice in taste-making. American by birth, she lived most of her life in London and influenced British taste as an art critic, salon host, and food essayist. In the introduction to *The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman* (1896), a compilation of essays first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Pennell writes: 'I have always wondered that woman could be so glib in claiming equality with man ... It seems almost – much as I deplore the admission – as if she were of coarser clay than man, lacking the more artistic instincts, the subtler, daintier emotions.'[51] Pennell's mock modesty in the introduction may have been targeted to ingratiate her with a mixed audience, more apt, thereby, to accept her judgments.

For the early French gastronomers and their successors, as for Pennell, writing about food was akin to art criticism; it is not surprising to find Pennell comparing, for instance, the arrangement of food on a plate to a painting or an etching. Discussing a '*fricasey of sole*', she concludes that, 'The beauty of the colour none can deny; the subtlety of the flavour none can resist.'[52] The food must be as pleasing to the eye as to the nose and mouth. In other instances, Pennell's language turns poetic. Illustrating the preparation of a salad dressing, she provides only hints of the recipe, warning the reader to have a 'suspicion of chives' and encouraging them to recognise

[50] J. Swift, Preface to *A Tale of a Tub. A Battle Between Antient and Modern Books* (London: J. Nutt, 1704), sig. Q2.
[51] E.R. Pennell, *The Feasts of Autolycus: The Diary of a Greedy Woman* (Chicago: Saalfield, 1900), pp. 5–6.
[52] Ibid., p. 95.

tarragon as 'indispensable'.[53] She steers clear of overfamiliarity with the cook in order to identify with the knowing consumer, or connoisseur. The effect of food on a gastronome, much like the impact of a painting or a poem on an art critic, reveals the sensibility of taste.

Pennell assimilates recipes into her essays, and this integration would influence such later British food writing as that of Elizabeth David, the maven of twentieth-century British cookery. Incorporating many components of gastronomy, David's recipes resemble short essays filled with personal narrative, gastronomic philosophy that highlights food as an art, and a schooling of the reader's taste, much as one finds in Brillat-Savarin's gastronomical-essayistic anthology, *The Physiology of Taste*. This trend for the essayistic recipe in the manner of Kitchiner or David, has only become more pervasive. Nearly all cookbooks today include food essays not only as prefaces but also as introductions to individual recipes. The transmission of recipes, moreover, occurs largely through food blogs – online, open-access, egalitarian gastronomical essays.[54] The language of food, from early on, has sat naturally within essays, which Francis Bacon in an unpublished preface compares to 'grains of salt which will rather give an appetite rather than offend with satiety'.[55] Given the malleability of the form, it is hardly surprising that the essay should remain the central form of food writing across various genres and media.

[53] Ibid., p. 55.

[54] On this understanding of essayistic blogs, see J. Pugh's 'Blogging in Britain: essays in the digital age' in this volume (Ch. 46).

[55] F. Bacon, 'Essays or counsels civil and moral' in H.G. Dick (ed.), *Selected Writings of Francis Bacon* (New York: Modern Library, 1955), p. 6.

18

Forms of Thought: Dreams, Reverie, and the Essay

MARGARET RUSSETT

What have dreams to do with the history of the essay? A response begins with the overlap between Samuel Johnson's dismissive definition of the essay – 'a loose sally of the mind, an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition' – and his equally flippant entry for reverie (derived from the French *rêver*, 'to dream') as 'loose musings' or 'irregular thought'.[1] Both characterised as deficient in form, reverie and the essay can be understood as twinned phenomena, assigned respectively to the experiential and critical registers. Formless forms, they are nonetheless both forms of thought: vehicles or inflections of consciousness. This chapter argues that reverie and essay both spring from the Enlightenment project of self-examination that made consciousness the one cynosure of human identity, as well as its most abiding mystery. For if, as René Descartes contended, being is founded on consciousness alone, the quality of being conscious has never yet been satisfactorily defined – because once put regularly in order, it is no longer consciousness. Perhaps, indeed, consciousness is more often experienced as 'loose musings' than as propositional content. If this is the case, then the loose sallies of the essay may come closer to capturing the sensation of thinking than do literary forms such as the blank verse meditation or modernist experiments in 'stream of consciousness'.

This chapter contends that the essay is best understood as a performance of consciousness in all its irregularity, intermittency, and elusiveness. This provisional description of a notoriously indefinable form is based on a historical survey of one essayistic subgenre: the dream essay. This subgenre, which includes meditations on the phenomenon of dreaming as well as prose accounts of particular dreams, originates in the seventeenth century as an

[1] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), *s.v.* 'Essay', 'Reverie'. For more on the Johnsonian idea of the essay, see N.M. Phillips and S. Logsdon's 'Loose sallies of the mind: distraction and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 12).

offshoot of Montaignian introspection; it burgeons in the wake of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Reveries*, and persists in the guise of 'creative non-fiction' as well as the psychoanalytic case study. The dream – as a modality of thought and as a literary form – furnishes a limit-case or even foil to consciousness, for as Sir Thomas Browne observed in his 1663 fragment, 'On Dreams':

> Half our days we pass in the shadow of the earth, and the brother of death exacts a third part of our lives. A good part of our sleeps is pieced out with visions, and fantastical objects wherein we are confessedly deceived. The day supplies us with truths, the night with fictions and falsehoods, which uncomfortably divide the natural account of our beings. And therefore having passed the day in sober labours and rational enquiries of truth, we are fain to betake ourselves unto such a state of being, wherein the soberest heads have acted all the monstrosities of melancholy, and which unto open eyes are no better than folly and madness.[2]

Yet, as Browne himself goes on to suggest, it is only by exploring the mysteries of *un*consciousness – visions, fantastical objects, fictions, and falsehoods – that we 'more sensibly understand ourselves'. Sensible or not, 'the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind', as Sigmund Freud observed in 1900; for dreams themselves are 'at bottom, nothing other than a particular form of thinking'.[3] Not the opposite of consciousness, the unconscious is best understood as a 'form' of thought, albeit a disorderly one. The loose sallies of the reverie and dream essay perform unconsciousness through gaps and meanderings, excesses and deficits.

Philosophic Dreams

It was Michel de Montaigne, the acknowledged originator of the essay, who remarked in his 1576 'Apology for Raimond Sebond' that 'our dreams are worth more than our meditations', even though meditating on his own mind was Montaigne's avowed project.[4] Montaigne added that

[2] T. Browne, 'On dreams' in *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. S. Wilkin, 3 vols. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1889–92), vol. 3, p. 343. I have modernised Browne's spelling.

[3] S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) in J. Strachey et al. (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), vol. 5, pp. 608, 506 n.

[4] M. Montaigne, 'Apology for Raimond Sebond' in *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. G.B. Ives, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), vol. 2, p. 357.

> They who have likened our life to a dream were perhaps more nearly right than they thought. When we dream, our soul lives, acts, exercises all its faculties neither more nor less than when it is awake ... There are always obscurities, aye, Cimmerian obscurities. We sleep when awake, and are awake when we sleep. I do not see so clearly in sleep; but, as for my waking state, I never find it sufficiently perfect and unclouded ... our waking is never so complete that it wholly casts out and scatters the musings which are the dreams of those who wake, and worse than dreams ... why do we not question whether our thinking, our acting, be not another form of dreaming, and our awaking some sort of sleeping?[5]

In an inverted anticipation of Freud's discovery, Montaigne proposes not just that dreams should be treated as thought, but that thought is a mode of dreaming. By likening the divagations of his essayistic style to the wanderings of the dream state, Montaigne brought dreaming into the domain of philosophy, even elevated it into a way of doing philosophy.

Descartes extended this line of thinking in his 1637 *Discourse on Method* and then in his subsequent, more personal, *Meditations*, a short book structured as a series of six related essays. Observing that 'the thoughts which come while one dreams' are often 'no less strong and clear'[6] than those which occur in the waking state, he concluded that neither logical clarity nor sensory vividness can be reliable indices of reality. Even as he writes, he mused, it may be that 'appearances are false and ... I am dreaming'.[7] The distinction between wakefulness and dreaming is finally unimportant, because in either state, 'it is very certain that it *seems to me* that I see light, hear a noise and feel heat; and this is properly what in me is called perceiving and this ... is nothing other than thinking'.[8] And for Descartes, thinking is the only phenomenon beyond dispute: *cogito, ergo sum*. If perception and dreaming are inflections of thought rather than philosophically distinct activities, the capacity to posit a dream state is as sure a proof of existence as is the capacity to write a *Discourse on Method*. *Somnio, ergo sum*, or more precisely, *scribo somniandi, ergo sum*. Like Montaigne, Descartes performed self-consciousness by writing: thinking was of no avail in the absence of his *Meditations*.

Descartes's contribution to the essay consisted in how he performed thinking itself as a series of informal, loosely organised 'meditations' couched in the first person. That these meditations unfolded from a defence of

[5] Ibid., p. 357.
[6] R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 58.
[7] Ibid., p. 107. [8] Ibid.; my emphasis.

dreaming seems more than coincidental, considering that he allegedly discovered his vocation in a dream. This dream was one of three that he dated to the night of 10 November 1619, when, as a young soldier, he retired to bed in a state of high 'enthusiasm' about his vocational prospects.[9] In the dream, Descartes comes upon two books: a dictionary and a *Corpus Poetarum*. In the book of poetry, he finds two verses. The first is titled 'Quod vitae sectabor iter' (Which path of life do I pursue?) and the second 'Est et Non' (It is and it is not). A stranger materialises just long enough to show him the second poem, then disappears, as do the books. 'What is remarkable', editorialises Descartes's biographer, Adrien Baillet, 'is that, doubting whether what he had just seen was dream or vision, he not only decided, while sleeping, that it was a dream, but he even made the interpretation of it before sleep left him ... Thereupon, doubting whether he dreamed or meditated, he awoke without emotion, and continued, with open eyes, the interpretation on the same idea'.[10]

Were one in quest of the first dream essay, it might be found unexpectedly 'lying at the origins of modern philosophy', an irrational kernel lodged within rationalism itself.[11] Descartes, evidently a lucid dreamer, does not merely heed his 'vision' as a biblical prophet might have done. He narrates and interprets his own dream, even while asleep; and on awaking, he cannot be sure that he no longer dreams. His essay performs thought as auto-meditation, but this thought cannot be disentangled from the illogic of the phenomena it examines. Despite its overtly allegorical character, the vision as Descartes describes it shares many features associated with actual dreams: abrupt appearances and disappearances; objects that morph without warning; strangers who are somehow also familiar. The phrase *Est et Non* suggests the ambiguous ontology of dreams, real events that leave no material traces. Even the history of this essay is dreamlike: the original account, in twelve pages of Latin, was found among Descartes's posthumous papers but promptly vanished, only to be resurrected by Baillet in seven pages of French, which were then omitted from (one is tempted to say, repressed by) the English translation of Baillet's biography in 1693.[12] The porosity of dreams, their evanescence, and the contagiousness of their formal features are among the themes of this chapter.

[9] R. Kennington, 'Descartes' "Olympica"', *Social Research*, 28:2 (Summer 1961), 173. For the text of Descartes's dream, I quote Kennington's English translation of Baillet's transcription.
[10] Ibid., pp. 181–2. [11] Ibid., p. 174.
[12] A. Baillet, *The Life of Monsieur Des Cartes*, trans. S.R. (London: R. Simpson, 1693).

That the interpretation of dreams could 'intimately tell us ourselves' was the belief of Descartes's contemporary, the physician and metaphysician Thomas Browne, whose fascination with his own dreams suffuses his *Religio Medici*, and also elicited a brief essay exploring the nature of dreams and where they come from. Convinced that 'the mass of flesh that circumscribes me limits not my mind', Browne adduced the wit and fecundity of his dreams as evidence that 'we are somewhat more than ourselves in our sleeps'. The dream, for Browne, is both a medical symptom and a metaphor: a 'melancholy conceit' for the vanity of human wishes, and a token of the soul's infinitude. It is, in other words, an apt emblem of Browne's disconcertingly associative style, and of writing that, whatever its nominal subject may be – funerary urns, the quincunx, or 'vulgar errors' – revolves around the paradoxes of human consciousness.[13]

Rêve and Reverie

Perhaps it was Montaigne's comment on 'the musings of those who wake' that inspired the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau to title his last work, a collection of ten posthumously published essays, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (written 1776–8). The French word '*rêverie*', loosely translated as 'day-dream', evokes an attenuation of consciousness that solicits conscious attention.[14] It is the natural consequence of Rousseau's unnatural isolation ('an incomprehensible chaos where I can make nothing out') which he can only describe by supposing himself 'suffering from indigestion and dreaming a bad dream'.[15] In his state of radical solitude, Rousseau takes his cue from Montaigne and conducts 'barometer readings of [his] soul' in a 'formless record of [his] reveries'.[16] Reverie, for Rousseau, connotes a purified consciousness, emptied of propositional content or even personality, as when, during his evenings on the Isle de St Pierre, he is 'plunged into . . . delicious reverie' by the 'ebb and flow of the water, its continuous yet undulating noise', which 'tak[es] the place of all the inward movements which my reverie had calmed within me', and makes him 'pleasurably aware of my existence, without troubling myself with thought'.[17] If the condition of reverie approaches – or at least intimates – the state of sheer association, then written reveries should 'say what I have

[13] Browne, *The Works*, vol. 2, pp. 444, 445, 445, respectively.
[14] Hereafter anglicised as 'reverie'.
[15] J.J. Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. P. France (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 27.
[16] Ibid., pp. 32–3. [17] Ibid., p. 87.

thought just as it came to me, with as little connection as the thoughts of this morning have with those of last night'.[18] In fact, the ten numbered 'walks' that comprise Rousseau's *Reveries* come closer to a Montaignian or Baconian topical organisation than his description implies; they include meditations on religion, truth-telling, and botany, as well as autobiographical anecdotes and miscellaneous apologies.

Yet in theory, if not quite in practice, this 'formless record' elevates Johnson's 'loose sally' into a mode of aesthetic freedom. The derogation of form suggests why, even while modelling his enterprise on Montaigne's, Rousseau rejects the word 'essay' in favour of 'reverie', with the latter's connotation of 'irregular thought'. A non-mimetic form, freed like the titular 'solitary' from social or generic conventions, the reverie can take in anything, being devoted to nothing. The notional ideal of purely associative writing anticipates modernist stream of consciousness in a startlingly literal way, as dramatised in Rousseau's recollection of awaking from a concussion to

> a moment of delight. I was conscious of nothing else. In this instant I was being born again, and it seemed as if all I perceived was filled with my frail existence. Entirely taken up by the present, I could remember nothing; I had no distinct notion of myself as a person . . . I did not know who I was . . . I watched my blood flowing as I might have watched a stream, without even thinking that the blood had anything to do with me. I felt throughout my whole being such a wonderful calm, that whenever I recall this feeling I can find nothing to compare with it in all the pleasures that stir our lives.[19]

Reverie collapses subject and object, just as it conflates memory, perception, and composition. With no 'distinct notion' of selfhood, Rousseau watches his 'frail existence' fill the space around him. The English word 'stream' translates the French *ruisseau*, a word so nearly identical with 'Rousseau' that it might as well be his own essence, or his own ink, flowing straight from the unconscious.[20]

This same stream supplies the pretext for a writing project beholden only to the performance of unbound subjectivity. Freed from the social contract by malevolent plotters, his useful life behind him, Rousseau can now indulge in 'fiction', which he associates less with 'stories and novels' than with lies that confer no 'advantage or disadvantage to oneself or others'.[21] Fictive reverie

[18] Ibid., p. 32. [19] Ibid., p. 39.
[20] See J.J. Rousseau, *Collection complète des oeuvres*, Vol. 10: *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* (Genève, 1780–9), p. 385.
[21] Ibid., p. 69.

partakes of philosophy, history, and many other genres but belongs to none; it cannot even be classed with stories, because, after all, stories are plotted. Like his persecutors, they have ends in view. Rousseau's text, flowing from one 'frail existence' to another, is self-referential but indifferent to the empirical person. In writing his *Reveries*, Rousseau suggests, he will 'live with [his] earlier self as [he] might with a younger friend', and in this way 'double the space of [his] existence'.[22] The younger friend is to the writer as the dreamer is to the waking person: although both may successively occupy the same body, they are, as John Locke put it, 'forensically' distinct – reciprocal 'others', or as William Wordsworth put it, 'two consciousnesses' – rather than one consolidated 'identity'.[23] Thus, to write in the mode of reverie is to perform consciousness without egotism, for the text belongs no more to the writer than to the self it recollects, or the consciousness it solicits.

Dreams and the Defamiliar Essay

Upon the translation of Rousseau's *Reveries* in 1796, the word 'reverie', hitherto rare in English publications, came to signify both introspective habits of mind and generically ambiguous modes of imaginative writing. Around the same time, the practice of recording dreams became increasingly commonplace. The poet Robert Southey and the chemist Humphry Davy kept journals of their dreams. John Polidori and Thomas Lovell Beddoes, both physicians as well as writers, wrote medical treatises on dreams. The Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg attributed his conversion to a series of visions that he related in his dream journals, *Drömboken* (1743–4). Samuel Taylor Coleridge was singularly fascinated with daydreams, nightmares, and opium reveries. His poem 'The Pains of Sleep' evokes the horrors of nightmare: a 'fiendish crowd/ Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me: / A lurid light, a trampling throng'.[24] 'Kubla Khan' was subtitled 'A Vision in a Dream', and in his brief prefatory essay to the poem, Coleridge credited the vision 'to a 'profound sleep, at least of the external senses' that had been brought on by the ingestion of an 'anodyne' (opium).[25] During this sleep, the

[22] Ibid., p. 34.
[23] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.C. Fraser, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), vol. 1, pp. 457–64; W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. J. Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and S. Gill (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 66.
[24] S.T. Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. E.H. Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 389.
[25] Ibid., p. 296.

poet 'could not have composed less than two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort'.[26] At once vision and text, 'Kubla Khan' is less poetical 'work' than Rousseauvian reverie.

Coleridge's friend, the essayist Charles Lamb, cited 'Kubla Khan' to illustrate 'the degree of the soul's creativeness in sleep' and its relation to the 'quantum of poetical faculty resident in the same soul waking'.[27] Leigh Hunt adduced 'The Pains of Sleep' to make much the same point. Both contrasted the heights of poetic imagination, manifested in Coleridge's extravagant dreams, with the lower degree sufficient to Lamb's 'proper element of prose'.[28] Dreams and phantasmagoria were nonetheless favourite subjects with both essayists. In 'On the Realities of the Imagination', Hunt contends that psychic events such as dreams should be judged, like works of art, by their effects on the experiencing consciousness:

> Whether everything consist not in what is called effect, it is sufficient for us that the effect is real . . . As in deliriums, for instance, it would be idle to go about persuading the patient that he did not behold the figures he says he does. He might reasonably ask us, if he could, how we know anything about the matter, or how we can be sure that in the infinite wonders of the universe certain realities may not become apparent to certain eyes, whether diseased or not.[29]

Lamb remarks in a similar vein, of medieval superstitions, that their seeming absurdity argues nothing against their meaning for those who believed in them: we simply 'do not know the laws of that country', and indeed, there is no 'canon by which a dream may be criticised'.[30] Lamb's deflection of judgment does not so much retract as extend the sceptical attitude cultivated by Descartes and Enlightenment essayists. For as no less a rationalist than Johnson had warned: 'Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation.'[31] Accordingly, Lamb cultivates a 'suspension of disbelief' (which Coleridge had associated with the 'state of the mind in Dreams') towards the

[26] Ibid.
[27] C. Lamb, 'Witches, and other night-fears' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 2, p. 69.
[28] Ibid., p. 70.
[29] L. Hunt, 'On the realities of the imagination' in *Essays and Miscellanies, Selected from The Indicator and Companion* (Philadelphia: W.P. Hazard, 1856), p. 172.
[30] Lamb, 'Witches, and other night-fears', pp. 65–6.
[31] S. Johnson, 'Preface, 1765' in A. Sherbo (ed.), *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Vols. 7–8: *Johnson on Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), vol. 7, p. 77.

phenomenon of credulity itself. At the same time, he 'excite[s] a feeling analogous to the supernatural' in his dreamlike evocations of times past and customs forgotten.[32]

Hunt's essay 'Of Dreams' wittily evokes the duplicity of oneiric imagery and the disorientation of the dreamer to consider what is meant by the descriptor 'dreamlike'. Characters in dreams often represent two people at once, but

> you are not at all surprised, or ... are only so at something not at all surprising. To be Tomkins and a bull at once, is the most ordinary of commonplaces; but that, being a bull, he should have horns, is what astonishes you ... To be in two places at once is not uncommon to a dreamer. He will also be young and old at the same time ... will live many years in a few minutes.[33]

By contrasting such nonsense with waking commonplaces, Hunt suggests how the otherness of the dream provides an inverted model of reality. The catalogue of paradoxes intimates 'something our sentences want to come to grips with', as Adam Phillips has remarked.[34] Amounting to a canon by which dreams *may* be criticised, Hunt's formal analysis befits the shiftiness and evasions of essays like Lamb's 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears' (1823), which begins with demonic possessions, then digresses to infantile anxieties, divagates to biblical commentaries, muses on mythological monsters, and abruptly quotes 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (subtitled 'A Poet's Reverie').[35] Having invoked Coleridge, Lamb compares the grandeur of 'Kubla Khan' with the 'poverty' of Elia's own dreams, relates one comically anticlimactic example, and 'subside[s]' into the essayist's 'proper element of prose'.[36] The effect could be described as stream of consciousness, but this stream alternately rushes, sidles, and dries up, sometimes even flowing backwards – not unlike the 'unnavigable river' re-routed by the dream interpreter, who finds its course 'at one moment choked by masses of rock and at another divided and lost among shallows and sandbanks'.[37] By the

[32] S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. J. Engell and W.J. Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 6–7.
[33] L. Hunt, 'Of dreams' in *Essays and Miscellanies*, p. 98.
[34] A. Phillips, 'The dream horizon', *Raritan* 26:1 (Summer 2006), 95.
[35] Coleridge, *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 186 n.
[36] Lamb, 'Witches, and other night-fears', pp. 69–70.
[37] S. Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* in Strachey (ed. and trans.), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, p. 16.

final sentence of 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears', the self-deprecating jest on Elia's 'tame and prosaic' dreams has morphed into a suggestion that his disjunctive prose style is, in fact, the 'proper element' of *dreams*, however low essays may stand in the hierarchy of literary genres.

Another of Lamb's Elia essays, 'Dream-Children; A Reverie' (1823), tells of Elia's grandmother, who lived in a 'great house in Norfolk' where 'the tragic incidents . . . familiar from the ballad of the Children in the Wood' were said to have taken place.[38] It recounts Elia's childhood visits, and recalls his heroic brother John L, 'as brave as he was handsome', who died tragically young after losing a limb in surgery. The essay is a layered fiction, as told to the narrator's imaginary 'little ones', Alice and John, who 'crept about me the other evening'.[39] Without a single paragraph break, and in sentences that pile clause upon clause for a page or more apiece, Lamb repeatedly calls attention to the narrator's mediation: 'then I told . . . I went on to say . . . and how frightened I used to be'.[40] Elia's lulling sentences evoke a legendary world, loaded with sensory impressions but exempt from the laws of cause and effect. In just one sentence, for instance, John goes from 'spirited youth', to cripple, to corpse, to 'haunt[ing]' memory, before we are told that 'the doctor took off his limb' for reasons unexplained.[41]

The house in Norfolk recedes into a 'traditionary' past, even before the final admission that the listening children 'are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams', upon which Elia awakes to find himself 'quietly seated in [his] bachelor armchair'.[42] With this meta-fictive flourish, Lamb both intensifies and allegorises the defamiliarising aura cast by his antiquated prose style – alternately ornate and jagged – upon the tenebrous scenes he invests with the 'wondrous charm' of 'Antiquity', which, 'being nothing, [is] every thing'.[43] Somewhat like the incantatory prosody of 'Kubla Khan', the artifice of Lamb's prose induces a reverie-like quiescence that is every so often burst with the éclat of the 'famous BUBBLE' memorialised in his first Elia essay, 'The South-Sea House' (1820).[44] In this way, the essayist accentuates the 'ebb and flow' of memory and impressions, given a fictive coherence in the persona of 'Elia'.

Thus, while Lamb is often described along with Hunt and William Hazlitt as a 'familiar' essayist, a better category for such conspicuously 'indigested

[38] C. Lamb, 'Dream-children; a reverie' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 100–1.
[39] Ibid., pp. 102, 100. [40] Ibid., pp. 101. [41] Ibid., pp. 102–3. [42] Ibid., p. 103.
[43] C. Lamb, 'Oxford in the vacation' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 9.
[44] C. Lamb, 'The South-Sea House' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 2.

piece[s]' as 'Dream-Children' and 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears' might be the '*de*familiar' essay. Viktor Shklovsky's term *ostranenie*, variously translated as 'defamiliarization' or 'enstrangement', describes how stylisation 'create[s] the sensation of seeing, and not . . . recognizing, things' through 'the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception'.[45] Freud's essay 'Das Unheimliche' ('The Uncanny') attempts to explain the eerie 'sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states' as a reminder of things better forgotten, but 'known of old and long familiar'.[46] Lamb's Elia essays enstrange otherwise unremarkable people and places – the clerks employed by a defunct corporation, a university library emptied of students – in archly archaic prose that turns them into 'fantastic shapes' whose 'importance is from the past'.[47]

The sense of helplessness described by Freud suffuses Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which documents the author's 'fascinating enthralment' to narcotics in order to account for the 'tremendous scenery which afterwards peopled the Opium-Eater's dreams'.[48] Like Hunt and Lamb, De Quincey borrows his dream scenery from Coleridge, who once told him about a series of etchings by Piranesi 'called his *Dreams*, and which record the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever':

> Some of them (I describe only from memory of Mr Coleridge's account) represented vast Gothic halls: on the floor of which stood all sorts of engines and machinery, wheels, cables, pulleys, levers, catapults, &c. &c. expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome. Creeping along the sides of the walls, you perceived a staircase; and upon it, groping his way upwards, was Piranesi himself: follow the stairs a little further, and you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below. Whatever is to become of poor Piranesi, you suppose, at least, that his labours must in some way terminate here. But raise your eyes, and behold a second flight of stairs still higher: on which again Piranesi is perceived, but this time standing on the very brink of the

[45] V. Shklovsky, 'Art, as device', trans. A. Berlina, *Poetics Today*, 36:3 (September 2015), 162. Berlina follows Benjamin Sher in preferring the neologism 'enstrangement' to either 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarization'; see V. Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. B. Sher, intro. G. Bruns (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp. xviii–xix.

[46] S. Freud, 'The uncanny' in Strachey (ed. and trans.), *Standard Edition*, vol. 17, pp. 220, 237.

[47] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 7.

[48] T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. G. Lindop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 2–4.

> abyss. Again elevate your eye, and a still more aerial flight of stairs is beheld: and again is poor Piranesi busy on his aspiring labours: and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall.[49]

Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons* series (1749–50) evoke the feeling rather than the settings of De Quincey's dreams. The repeating 'Piranesis' dramatise the dispersed subjectivity of dream-consciousness in which 'we make ourselves central to every movement' while losing any 'distinct notion' of personhood.[50] The aesthetics of the sublime aggrandise the dreamer's haplessness, while the unending flights of stairs serve as 'a reminder of compulsive repetition itself'.[51] The surreptitious rhetorical shifts from the descriptive past tense into the present, and then into commands, evoke the temporal fluctuations of dreams while erasing the nominal distinctions among Piranesi, Coleridge, De Quincey – and De Quincey's reader, uncannily made conscious of someone else's dream. By enlisting his reader into unconsciousness, De Quincey defamiliarises consciousness per se.

De Quincey's dreams stage consciousness as a mystery incapable of resolution. In taking their 'grandeur' as his subject, he elaborates the Brownian paradox according to which dreams yield esoteric truths 'by sagacious exposition', although this exposition might just as well leave us 'ridiculously deluded'.[52] As Browne – a favourite of both De Quincey and Lamb – suggests, the self we discover through dreams and writing about dreams can never be identical with the self who discovers. Rather, as De Quincey puts it in *Suspiria de Profundis*, 'the machinery for dreaming' is 'the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy'. These shadows haunt waking consciousness as a 'determination to reverie', which transforms the real City of London into 'mighty labyrinths' and the optical illusion of the Brocken Spectre (a shadow thrown by an observer upon a cloud) into a 'Dark Interpreter' who is, and is not, the author of De Quincey's visions.[53] The stylistic signature of the uncanny hints at a world in which reality has been 'suspended' (to use another favourite De Quinceyan word) by the machinery of the dream.

No royal road to self-understanding, the De Quinceyan dream is at once a mode of aesthetic experience and an autogenous art form that exists in '*virtual* time' and virtual space.[54] Literally self-referential, the dream supplies

[49] Ibid., p. 70. [50] Freud, 'The uncanny', p. 238; Rousseau, *Reveries*, p. 39.
[51] N. Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 102.
[52] De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 87; Browne, 'On dreams', p. 343; T. Browne, *Religio Medici*, quoted in Phillips, 'Dream horizon', 93.
[53] De Quincey, *Confessions*, pp. 87, 156, 34. [54] Ibid., p. 106.

both material and metaphor for an essay devoted solely to the performance and reduplication of consciousness. As an artistic form in itself and a model for 'those wandering musical variations', the 'parasitical thoughts, feelings, [and] digressions' that adorn De Quincey's prose, the dream generates its own formalisms – be they the Freudian mechanisms of condensation and displacement, or the De Quinceyan 'dream-fugue' iterating the 'theme of sudden death' in differing keys.[55] De Quincey's essays return compulsively to 'scenes' or emblems of consciousness, such as 'the great town of L– ' which, seen from a distant height, 'was somewhat typical of what took place in . . . reverie': 'it seemed to me as if then first I stood . . . aloof from the uproar of life; as if the tumult, the fever, and the strife, were suspended'.[56] In *Suspiria de Profundis*, the dream even suggests its own figure of interpretation, the 'natural and mighty palimpsest [of] the human brain'. Like a recycled parchment, or 'mystic writing pad', consciousness is layered with 'ideas, images, feelings, [which] have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet in reality not one has been extinguished.'[57] In the dream, buried memory 'wheels back' into consciousness.[58] But as with all striking figures, the relation between tenor and vehicle uncannily reverses into the hint that consciousness itself may be no more than a metaphor, the dream-essay its inscription.

The Psychoanalytic Dream Essay

By recruiting dreams into the service of psychotherapy, Freud plotted one trajectory for the post-Romantic dream essay: the scrutiny of our sleeping visions for what they 'intimately tell us [of] ourselves'. This rationale for dream-writing has proven more durable than some other facets of psychoanalytic praxis, no doubt partly because analysts, like other people, love talking and writing about their dreams. In adducing so many of his own dreams – even embarrassing ones – for *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud was behaving more like an essayist than a scientist. Carl Jung's autobiographical collection of memories, dreams, and reflections, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken* (1962), declares its indebtedness to the Romantic dream essay with an epigraph from Coleridge's *Notebooks* that purports to describe 'a great metaphysician':

[55] Ibid., pp. 94, 224. [56] Ibid., p. 49.
[57] Ibid., p. 144. See Freud, 'A note upon the "mystic writing pad"' in Strachey (ed.), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, pp. 225–32; and, also on this image from De Quincey, see D. Gigante's 'On books: the bibliographical essay' in this volume (Ch. 15).
[58] De Quincey, *Confessions*, p. 146.

> He looked at his own Soul
> With a Telescope.
> What seemed
> all irregular, he saw and
> shewed to be beautiful Constellations;
> and he added
> to the Consciousness hidden
> worlds within worlds.[59]

The psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips observes, 'If the dream represents our paradoxical obscurity to ourselves', it also implies that 'there is no available reality compared with which we can see ourselves as deluded'.[60] Browne, more interested in his dreams than in his waking life, would have agreed. Dreaming was at once another mode of authorship and a mine of paradoxes for the writing consciousness. 'In one dream', boasts Browne, 'I can compose a whole comedy, behold the action, and apprehend the jests, and laugh myself awake at the conceits thereof. Were my memory as faithful as my reason is then fruitful, I would never study but in my dreams.'[61]

As Browne and Phillips suggest, the dream's appeal to the writer consists partly in its provision of material, but even more in the fact that a dream – once recalled, related, or recorded – is already an 'essay'. 'Dreams', Phillips points out, 'don't speak for themselves; we give them voice. In this sense . . . dreams are what we might call literary, not simply because they exist in the shared world of language . . . but also because they observe conventions.'[62] Those conventions map felicitously onto the essay form as Phillips describes it. Like dreams, essays 'can wander, they can meander'. They present 'opportunit[ies] to digress, to change the subject, to be incoherent, to come to conclusions that are then overcome and surpassed'.[63] And digression, Phillips writes, 'is secular revelation', a remark that applies equally to the dream.[64] For while dreams may offer us 'revelations of something truer or

[59] C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. A. Jaffé, trans. R. and C. Winston (New York: Vintage, 1963). Jaffé has transcribed Coleridge's prose notebook entry as a free-verse poem. Compare K. Coburn (ed.), *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 1: *1794–1804* (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002), p. 535.

[60] Phillips, 'Dream horizon', 93, 95. Phillips's essay expands upon a remark by Browne. For more on Phillips as a psychoanalytic essayist and on psychoanalysis and the essay more generally, see D. Russell's 'Feeling real: psychoanalysis and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 37).

[61] T. Browne, *Religio Medici* (1643; Oxford: J. Vincent, 1833), p. 142.

[62] Phillips, 'Dream horizon', 99.

[63] A. Phillips interviewed by P. Holdengraber, 'The art of nonfiction, no. 7', *Paris Review*, 108 (Spring 2014), 42.

[64] Phillips, quoted by Holdengraber in ibid., 30.

more real or necessary than so-called ordinary consciousness' perceives, the mystery lies not so much 'within' ourselves as in the consensual reality they enstrange. By making us 'spectators of the unintelligible', dreams 'give us a way to talk about the unintelligibility of reality, and about the ways we acknowledge this unintelligibility'.[65]

Phillips's comment on 'the unintelligibility of reality' could stand as a heading for W.G. Sebald's book-length reverie, *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), which reads the Norfolk countryside through which he meanders as a palimpsest of many histories, including that of the authorial consciousness. Perhaps it is Sebald's obliquity, his attention to 'what we see when we are not looking', that accounts for the epithet 'dreamlike', so often applied to his work.[66] Sebald suggests the analogy himself when he remarks, 'I suppose it is submerged realities that give to dreams their curious air of hyper-reality. But perhaps there is something else as well, something nebulous, gauze-like, through which everything one sees in a dream seems, paradoxically, much clearer.'[67] He returns to this theme when, after many divagations and a long interlude on Sir Thomas Browne, he describes one particular vision that merges the De Quinceyan motifs of Piranesi, the labyrinth, and the palimpsest into a figure for the enstrangement of consciousness:

> I was on Dunwich Heath again once more in a dream, walking the endlessly winding paths again, and again I could not find my way out of the maze which I was convinced had been created solely for me . . . when I looked down from this vantage point I saw the labyrinth, the light sandy ground, the sharply delineated contours of hedges taller than a man and almost pitch-black now – a pattern simple in comparison with the tortuous trail I had behind me, but one which I knew in my dream, with absolute certainty, represented a cross-section of my brain.[68]

If consciousness finds itself in the essay, it does so by winding towards and away from revelation, in and out of wakefulness, closer to and further from the reality that we apprehend only by looking inward. By picturing the mind as paradox, dreams model a notional coherence to which the essay aspires, and from which it perpetually digresses. The further it strays from that ideal, the more powerfully we are reminded that full coherence is the dream, and consciousness knowable only as the impossibility of its capture.

[65] Phillips, 'Dream horizon', 93, 108.
[66] Ibid., 95. On *The Rings of Saturn* as 'dream' and 'palimpsest', see the reviews by Roberta Silman and Richard Eder, quoted as jacket copy on W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. M. Hulse (New York: New Directions, 1998).
[67] Sebald, *Rings of Saturn*, pp. 79–80. Sebald has just quoted Thomas Browne (though not Browne's remark on the theatre of dreams).
[68] Ibid., p. 173.

19

The Urban Familiar Essay of the Romantic Era

UTTARA NATARAJAN

Although we may readily construct a literary history for the 'familiar' or conversational essay of the Romantic era that would begin with Michel de Montaigne and progress via Joseph Addison and Richard Steele to essayists like Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, this chapter will contend that the latter drew more immediately from the explosive manifesto of their time, William Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802), an essay that makes familiarity the very locus of humanity. In doing so, the Romantic essayists made two critical modifications. First, taking up Wordsworth's understanding of the poet as 'a man speaking to men', they made conversational prose, rather than poetry, the medium of that expression.[1] Second, and critically related to this, they shifted the emphasis back from nature to the city as the site in which the everyday, the real, becomes the ideal – a source of heightened awareness, through the quality of attention paid to it. Among other essay writers at this time, Hunt, Hazlitt, and Lamb developed a poetics of familiarity that was at once distinctly Romantic and characteristically urban.

This chapter will suggest that the established understanding of lyric, as the expression of a self or personality, may be brought to bear on the urban familiar essay of the Romantic period, enhanced by the recognition that the impact of that self, its ability to generate and sustain a relation with others (particularly in a crowded metropolis like London), has an ethical bearing. The essay is central to the project of writing the self in the Romantic era, and it departs from its eighteenth-century periodical forebears in transmuting – subliming, transforming, irradiating – the real into the ideal and back again.

[1] W. Wordsworth, 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* in S. Gill (ed.), *The Major Works: Including the Prelude*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 603; for another account of the essayist as a Wordsworthian 'man speaking to men', see P. Keen's 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' in this volume (Ch. 14).

In his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge claims for poetry the power to direct the mind 'to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for . . . the film of familiarity', and in his *Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821), Shelley echoes the claim: 'Poetry . . . strips the veil of familiarity from the world . . . it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity.'[2] By contrast, in the great prose genre of the Romantic era, the familiar and everyday found in the urban scene that the essayists took for their distinctive milieu are not stripped away or purged, but translated. In this way, a poetics of familiarity finds its consummate expression in the Romantic essay.

Prose Poetics

In a well-known letter to Wordsworth of early 1801, responding to the 'Preface' of the previous year, Charles Lamb replies at the same time to Wordsworth's invitation to host him and his sister in Cumbria, making clear that his attachment to the city, the basis of his declining to visit, has also informed his reading of the preface. Provocatively, he contrasts 'dead nature' with the life of the city, its teeming humanity, as the true source of vitality: 'I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much *Life*.'[3] Where, to Wordsworth, humanity finds its completest expression in a binding relation to nature ('the passions of men . . . incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature'), Lamb sets humanity against nature.[4] The markers of value in the familiar antithesis of town and country, so passionately enlarged by Wordsworth, are exactly reversed by Lamb: 'So *fading* upon me from disuse, have been the Beauties of Nature . . . so ever fresh & green and warm are all the inventions of men and assemblies of men in this great city.'[5]

A year onward, this letter, with its deliberate relocation of Wordsworth's 'common life' from nature to the city, morphs into the first of Lamb's

[2] S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. J. Engell and W.J. Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), vol. 2, p. 7; P.B. Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Z. Leader and M. O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 698.

[3] C. Lamb to W. Wordsworth, 30 January 1801, in E.W. Marrs, Jr. (ed.), *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975–8), vol. 1, p. 267.

[4] W. Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 597.

[5] For a reading of Lamb's 'sympathy with Wordsworth' in his response to *Lyrical Ballads* and its Preface, see chapter 8, 'The Urban Romantic: Lamb's Landscapes of Affection' in Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 185–214.

familiar essays, published in 1802 in *The Morning Post*, whose readers would instantly have recognised, in Lamb's 'Beauties of Nature', the allusion to Wordsworth's preface and to Wordsworth's celebration of nature more generally. The essayist's determinedly metropolitan identity is announced by the pseudonym that serves as the essay's title, 'A Londoner', and although that identity would change, Lamb's urban essayistic personality was to remain unchanged in his later essays. As Susan Oliver has observed, 'The Elia essays contributed to a particular kind of writing that took nineteenth-century journalism into new areas: the essay about the city, written by the walker of the streets', and that contribution began with 'The Londoner' in 1802, explicitly as a reaction against Wordsworth.[6] This essay, intended as the first of a series, contains what was to become a characteristic manoeuvre – namely, the slide from familiar to ideal (and back again) in the rendering of the urban subject: 'I see grand principles of honour at work in the dirty ring which encompasses two combatants with fists, and principles of no less eternal justice in the tumultuous detectors of a pickpocket.'[7]

Over a decade later, Leigh Hunt's essay 'On Washerwomen', published in *The Examiner* in 1816, more overtly announced a new departure in its unitary focus on an urban subject. Hunt's 'detached sketches' are among 'his greatest innovations in the genre' of the essay, according to Charles de Paolo; later on, his urban essays would provide a model for Charles Dickens's journeyman sketches of urban life and character.[8] His essay 'On Washerwomen' offers a tongue-in-cheek comparison between his own prefatory comments and Wordsworth's preface ('But we are making a very important preface to what may turn out a very trifling subject').[9] Hunt not only advertises his adherence to Wordsworth's injunction to choose 'subjects from common

[6] S. Oliver, 'Walking and imagining the city: the transatlanticity of Charles Lamb's essays for the *London Magazine*', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 154 (Autumn 2011), 115.

[7] C. Lamb, 'The Londoner' in E.V. Lucas (ed.), *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols. (London: Methuen, 1903–5), vol. 1, p. 402.

[8] C. de Paolo, 'Hunt, Leigh' in T. Chevalier (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Essay* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 413. For an account of Dickens as an urban essay-traveller, see J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' in this volume (Ch. 25). For a more detailed discussion of Hunt's influence on Dickens's early sketches, see U. Natarajan, 'Charles Dickens's realism and the Romantic essayists', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 60:4 (Autumn 2020), 761–81.

[9] L. Hunt, 'On washerwomen' in J.B. Priestley (ed.), *Leigh Hunt: Selected Essays* (London: J.M. Dent, 1929), p. 51. In the absence of a complete edition of Hunt's essays, I have chosen this anthology over the more recent Pickering & Chatto edition of Hunt's *Selected Writings*, because it offers the most convenient and comprehensive selection of Hunt's familiar essays available in a single volume.

life', but also contends that his substitution of the urban for the rural subject makes his own literary practice more egalitarian than Wordsworth's:

> The reader sees that we are Wordsworthian enough not to confine our tastes to the received elegancies of society; and, in one respect, we go further than Mr Wordsworth, for, though as fond, perhaps, of the country as he, we can manage to please ourselves in the very thick of cities, and even find there as much reason to do justice to Providence, as he does in the haunts of sportsmen, and anglers, and all-devouring insects.[10]

Thus, for both Hunt and Lamb, the familiarity, or quotidian quality, of the essay belongs to its urban content. And if in Lamb's 'The Londoner' the familiar and the ideal transition easily from one to the other, Hunt's 'On Washerwomen' explicitly highlights this transition from the 'commonplace' to the 'unlimited' in the associations suggested by the urban subject: 'The beauty of this unlimited power of suggestion in writing is, that you may take up the driest and most commonplace of all possible subjects, and strike a light out of it to warm your intellect and your heart by.'[11] In that 'light', we recognise an ideal, a largeness of conception grounded in a common humanity. In other words, the assertion of the essay's urban subject and context, and synonymously, its charge of familiarity, makes a claim for the greater humanism of the essay – its greater concern with the ordinary human condition – than even the poetry prescribed in Wordsworth's preface.

Likewise proclaiming this virtue of the essay genre, Hazlitt adapted Wordsworth's manifesto for Romantic poetics to the purposes of the essay. In 'On Familiar Style', published in the second volume of *Table-Talk* in 1822, he transforms Wordsworth's 'real language of men' or the 'language really used by men' into the essayistic objective 'to write as any one would speak in common conversation', his adjective 'common' confirming the shared content – familiarity – with Wordsworth's 'subjects from common life'.[12] His aspiration to a 'purity of expression' echoes Wordsworth's call for a language that is 'purified', and Wordsworth's rejection of 'ornaments' is repeated in Hazlitt's dismissal of 'mere shewy, unsubstantial ornaments'.[13] To Wordsworth, 'Poetry sheds no tears "such as Angels weep," but natural and human tears', and Hazlitt satirises writers who think to 'soar far above

[10] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 612; Hunt, 'On washerwomen', p. 52.
[11] Hunt, 'On washerwomen', p. 51.
[12] W. Hazlitt, 'On familiar style' in P.P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), vol. 8, p. 242; Wordsworth, 'Preface', pp. 595, 597.
[13] Hazlitt, 'On familiar style', pp. 242, 244; Wordsworth, 'Preface', pp. 597, 603, 607.

the vulgar failing of the *Sermo humi obrepens*' (words that creep on the ground).[14] His 'very word that exactly fits' the subject or 'thing you want to express' is in the same vein as Wordsworth's 'permanent, and . . . philosophical language'.[15] Both writers suggest that it is the familiar that leads most directly to the profound.

But where Wordsworth sources his language from rural subjects shaped by what he calls the 'sameness and narrow circle of . . . intercourse' that marks country living, Hazlitt's own criteria for the familiar style indicate social confidence and a breadth of awareness: 'To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes.'[16] The attribute of 'ease', reiterated a little further on in the essay,[17] suggests urbanity, a habit of assured and unstrained communication, and the descriptor 'as any one would speak in common conversation' indicates a regular and frequent exchange with one's fellows. Familiarity – the humanistic signifier of the quotidian and everyday – entails a departure from Wordsworth's practice also in the discarding of dialect, provincialism, and slang, on the grounds of their too exclusive application. As Hazlitt writes, 'All provincial and bye-phrases come under the same mark of reprobation – all such as the writer transfers to the page from his fire-side or a particular *coterie*.'[18] In contrast to such usage, 'A fine tact is shewn in adhering to those [words] which are perfectly common, and yet never falling into any expressions which are debased . . . A truly natural or familiar style can never be quaint or vulgar, for this reason, that it is of universal force and applicability.'[19] Hazlitt's 'tact' nicely captures a 'familiar style' that is above all a mode of sociality.

That this sociality is categorically urban is spelled out in another essay by Hazlitt, 'On Coffee-House Politicians' (1822): 'I do not think there is any thing deserving the name of society to be found out of London', a view expanded subsequently in his essay 'On Londoners and Country People' (1823). There, invoking Wordsworth again, Hazlitt emphasises the absence of such society in the country: 'Look at the company in a country-theatre . . . and see the coldness, the sullenness, the want of sympathy, and the way in

[14] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 602; Hazlitt, 'On familiar style', p. 246.
[15] Hazlitt, 'On familiar style', p. 243; Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 597.
[16] Wordsworth, 'Preface', p. 597; Hazlitt, 'On familiar style', p. 242.
[17] Hazlitt, 'On familiar style', p. 243. [18] Ibid., p. 244. [19] Ibid., p. 243.

which they turn round to scan and scrutinise one another. In London there is a *public*; and each man is part of it. We are gregarious, and affect the kind.'[20] Intersubjectivity, based on the moral relations generated through a shared common or public life, is construed as an urban phenomenon. The conversational style of the familiar essay, as practised by Hazlitt and his peers, was an exemplary mode of urban expression that claimed, on that very basis, the moral instrumentality for prose that Wordsworth had claimed for poetry. Wordsworth locates 'common life' – the site of intersubjectivity – in nature, but for the familiar essayist, whether his subject is himself or his milieu, such common life in urban sociability (despite occasional excursions into the countryside).

Familiar Ideals

The great unacknowledged contribution of the familiar essay of the Romantic era to the British essay tradition is arguably that it brought to vivid life the variegated experience of the city. In their work on metropolitan culture and Cockneyism in the era, scholars such as Jeffrey Cox and Gregory Dart have opened up a vitally important field of study, advancing our understanding of a distinctly urban Romanticism to which the essayists are central.[21] In the wake of these scholars, Simon Hull has argued that the essay embodies a quintessentially metropolitan outlook or bent of mind.[22] What such studies may not fully convey – perhaps because it is taken for granted – is the sheer sweep and glorious detail of the urban scene represented by the familiar essay.

Here, for instance, is the city in winter from Hunt's essay 'Bad Weather' (1828):

> Think of a street in London at once narrow, foggy, and noisy; the snow thawing, not because the frost has not returned, but because the union of

[20] W. Hazlitt, 'On coffee-house politicians' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 8, p. 203, and W. Hazlitt, 'On Londoners and country people' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 12, p. 77. Jon Mee makes the case that 'Hazlitt was . . . a writer for whom the theory and practice of conversation were part of his affiliation to an inclusive idea of the republic of letters as a species of open and ongoing exchange.' J. Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 239.

[21] J.N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); G. Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810–1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[22] S.P. Hull, *The Familiar Essay, Romantic Affect and Metropolitan Culture: The Sweet Security of Streets* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018).

> mud and smoke prevails against it; and then the unnatural cold sound of the clank of milk-pails (if you are up early enough); or, if you are not, the chill, damp, strawy, rickety hackney-coaches going by, with fellows inside of them with cold feet, and the coachman a mere bundle of rags, blue nose, and jolting.[23]

Or we might cite the exuberance of his description of a London toy shop (to which Hazlitt later alludes admiringly) in 'A Nearer View of Some of the Shops' (1820):

> In the corner opposite are battle-doors and shuttle-cocks, which have their maturer beauties; balls, which possess the additional zest of the danger of breaking people's windows; – ropes, good for swinging and skipping, especially the long ones which others turn for you, while you run in a masterly manner up and down, or skip in one spot with an easy and endless exactitude of toe, looking alternately at their conscious faces; – blood-allies, with which the possessor of a crisp finger and thumb-knuckle causes the smitten marbles to vanish out of the ring; kites, which must appear to more vital birds a ghastly kind of fowl, with their grim, long, white faces, no bodies, and endless tails; – cricket-bats, manly to handle; – trap-bats, a genteel inferiority; – swimming-corks, despicable; – horses on wheels, an imposition on the infant public; – rocking-horses, too much like Pegasus, ardent yet never getting on; – Dutch toys, so like life, that they ought to be better; – Jacob's ladders, flapping down one over another their tintinnabulary shutters; – dissected maps, from which the infant statesmen may learn how to dovetail provinces and kingdoms; – paper posture-makers, who hitch up their knees against their shoulder-blades, and dangle their legs like an opera dancer; – Lilliputian plates, dishes, and other household utensils, in which a grand dinner is served up out of half an apple; . . . carts – carriages – hobby-horses, upon which the infant equestrian prances about proudly on his own feet; – in short, not to go through the whole representative body of existence – dolls, which are so dear to the maternal instincts of little girls.[24]

Hunt tends to convey present experience, whereas in Lamb's essays the romance of the city, hidden in its past, is nudged into view in descriptions of buildings such as the South-Sea House: 'a melancholy looking, handsome,

[23] L. Hunt, 'Bad weather' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 60.

[24] L. Hunt, 'A nearer view of some of the shops' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 31. Hazlitt pays a handsome tribute to this description: 'I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr Leigh Hunt has treated it so well, in a paper in the *Indicator*, on the production of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it, I should only pass for an imitator of that ingenious and agreeable writer, and for an indifferent one into the bargain.' W. Hazlitt, 'Why distant objects please' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 8, p. 258.

brick and stone edifice, to the left – where Threadneedle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate ... its magnificent portals ever gaping wide, and disclosing to view a grave court, with cloisters and pillars, with few or no traces of goers-in or comers-out'.[25] We also find it in urban sites, such as the Inner Temple: 'the most elegant spot in the metropolis. What a transition for a countryman visiting London for the first time – the passing from the crowded Strand or Fleet-street, by unexpected avenues, into its magnificent ample squares, its classic green recesses!'[26] The same kind of nostalgic romance characterises London's people, such as Lamb's friend James White, a wit and fellow author who would host annual sausage feasts for the hungry chimney sweepers of the city:

> O it was a pleasure to see the sable younkers lick in the unctuous meat, with *his* more unctuous sayings – how he would fit the tit bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors – how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it 'must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating' – how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony, – how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking.[27]

In Hazlitt's essays, the panorama of urban characters is as eclectic and tightly packed as in Lamb's: writers, wits, theatregoers, tradesmen, sportsmen, and entertainers; the company at William Godwin's and James Northcote's homes, at the Southampton Coffee House and at Jack Randall's 'Hole in Wall'; the pugilists, Tom Hickman and Bill Neate; the rope-dancer, Mr Richer; the legendary fives-player John Cavanagh, an Irish immigrant, cheek by jowl with an Indian immigrant (whom, though the essay does not name him, we know to be Ramo Samee, a juggler of astonishing skill, pitched into the city – and the essay – from the Madras Presidency). This last is memorably described in Hazlitt's essay 'The Indian Jugglers', from *Table-Talk* (1821):

> To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to

[25] C. Lamb, 'The South-Sea House' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 1.
[26] C. Lamb, 'The old benchers of the Inner Temple' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 83.
[27] C. Lamb, 'The praise of chimney-sweepers' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 113.

> make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage – there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired any thing in the whole course of his life.[28]

Here, as in other of Hazlitt's essays, the familiar urban subject is aggrandised by the wealth of detail with which it is represented. In his art criticism, Hazlitt repeatedly challenges Joshua Reynolds's tenet that the ideal should rise above particular details, proposing instead an alternative model, antithetical to Reynolds's, where the ideal is intensely particular, the power of its character inhering in the extent of its particularity.[29] His own essays excel in enlarging the familiar subject by aggregation, constructing a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.[30] Such aggregation is especially marked in the extraordinary compound sentences, such as the one describing the Indian juggler above, which progress through a dazzling succession of independent clauses and which are so distinctive a feature of Hazlitt's urban familiar style.

The amplification of the familiar subject through an aggregation of detail, formally expressed through a chain of association, marks Hazlitt's essayistic practice and, to a lesser extent, that of Hunt. In Lamb's essays, we come across another mode of idealisation, namely, sublimation through liminality. This is a keynote of Elia's self-construction, most notably in the essay, 'Imperfect Sympathies' (1821), where, aligning himself with 'an order of imperfect intellects ... which in its constitution is essentially anti-Caledonian', the essayist valorises his own fuzzy thinking:

[28] Hazlitt, 'On coffee-house politicians' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 8, p. 192; 'On Londoners and country people' (vol. 12, p. 72); 'The fight' (vol. 17, pp. 79–83); and 'The Indian jugglers' (vol. 8, pp. 79–80, 86–9, 78). For a lively and informative account, with excellent illustrations, of Ramo Samee's career, see J. Zubrzycki, *Jadoowallahs, Jugglers and Jinns: A Magical History of India* (Delhi: Picador, 2018), pp. 192–215.

[29] See, especially, W. Hazlitt, 'Introduction to an account of Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses IV: on the ideal' (1815); 'The Elgin marbles' (1816); and 'On the Elgin marbles' (1822) in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 17, pp. 77–84, 100–3, and 145–66, respectively.

[30] For the importance of the idea of aggregation in Hazlitt's thought, see U. Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals, and the Metaphysics of Power* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), esp. pp. 133–6; also, U. Natarajan, 'The veil of familiarity: Romantic philosophy and the familiar essay', *Studies in Romanticism*, 42:1 (Spring 2003), 35–7.

> The owners of the sort of faculties I allude to, have minds rather suggestive than comprehensive. They have no pretences to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth . . . . Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays at a system, is the utmost they pretend to . . . . The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning.[31]

Outlining by contrast the 'Caledonian' brain, which delights in logic and reasoned truths, the essayist paints a portrait of a solid citizen at odds with liminality, and consequently, an implied self-portrait of the essayist through antithesis:

> The brain of a true Caledonian (if I am not mistaken) is constituted upon quite a different plan . . . . He never hints or suggests any thing, . . . His understanding is always at its meridian – you never see the first dawn, the early streaks. – He has no falterings of self-suspicion. Surmises, guesses, misgivings, half-intuitions, semi-consciousnesses, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions, have no place in his brain, or vocabulary. The twilight of dubiety never falls upon him . . . . Between the affirmative and the negative there is no border-land with him. You cannot hover with him upon the confines of truth, or wander in the maze of a probable argument. He always keeps the path.[32]

Not even asserting his own description as truth, the urban essayist suggests himself as an in-betweener, perceiving and constructing borderlands and twilight zones in a metropolis that is a clash of different peoples. The parenthetical 'if I am not mistaken', deftly undercuts the fixity of the anti-Caledonian view, and perhaps, too, that of his other prejudices (or imperfect sympathies), some even more unpalatable, declared in the same essay, against Jews, Black people and Quakers.[33] In Elia's 'half-intuitions' and 'semi-consciousnesses', we find a parallel to John Keats's 'half-knowledge' or 'halfseeing', a dimness of vision ensuing from the magnitude – or sublimity – of what the essayist contemplates.[34]

Bearing in mind that obscurity, incompleteness, and the undefinable are all associated with the sublime, we may recognise a quality of sublimity in a

[31] C. Lamb, 'Imperfect sympathies' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 59. [32] Ibid., pp. 59–60.
[33] Ibid., pp. 61–4.
[34] J. Keats to G. and T. Keats, 27 December 1817, and J. Keats to J. Reynolds, 3 February 1818, in H.E. Rollins (ed.), *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 194 and 224, respectively.

variety of Lamb's urban subjects, as pictured by the 'half-intuition' of the essayist. We might call them threshold characters, conditions, and spaces: the South-Sea House, where 'some forms of business are still kept up, though the soul be long since fled'; the fears that lack embodiment in 'Witches, and Other Night-Fears'; the 'inexplicable, half-understood appearances' of the ghostly 'Old Benchers' who used to live in the Inner Temple, 'enshrouded' in 'preternatural mist'; the chimney sweepers, 'blooming through their first nigritude; the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek'; the cook on the old Margate Hoy (a 'happy medium, ... comfortable ambassador between sea and land!') and on the same ship, the lad who 'was as one, being with us, but not of us'.[35] In 'A Character of the Late Elia' (1823), a 'friend' of Elia announces the latter's departure from the world, mourned by the two-faced Janus, at the turning point of the old year into the new.[36] Irony, which Elia names as his defining characteristic, is itself an in-between mode, conveying also the opposite of what it expresses.[37]

A Common Ground

David Russell, in his study *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2018), finds in Lamb's essays (and in those of a range of Victorian essayists after him) a response to the rapid increase in urbanisation in the first half of the nineteenth century and the social confusion that was its consequence, the latter destabilising the ground of communal experience upon which the Romantic familiar essay relied. Faced with a proliferation of otherness in the city, he argues, Lamb's essays evade knowing, or epistemological certainty, to opt for alternative, more open and tentative modes of relation.[38] This evasion is the 'tact' of Russell's title and the governing paradigm of his study, bearing, as in Hazlitt's use of the term in the essay 'On Familiar Style', the connotation of sociality. Tim Milnes's *The Testimony of Sense: Empiricism and the Essay from Hume to Hazlitt* (2019) also posits epistemological uncertainty in the mode of the essay, an

[35] Lamb, essays above named in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 1, 68, 90, 108, 178, 181.
[36] C. Lamb, 'A character of the late Elia', *London Magazine*, 7:16 (January 1823), 19. This essay was partially reprinted as the 'Preface' to *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833); see also Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 152.
[37] See Lamb's comments in several 'Elia' essays in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 29, 60, 152.
[38] D. Russell, '"Our debt to Lamb": the Romantic essay and the emergence of tact' in *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 12–40.

uncertainty that inheres not in an absent but a fragile epistemological ground.[39] Where Lamb's essays inaugurate Russell's chronology, in Milnes's account the essays of Hazlitt and Lamb mark a culmination in a post-Revolutionary era that has seen the disintegration of an Enlightenment public sphere. In reaction, the essay performatively enacts, in the form of familiar conversation, an intersubjective 'trust' that forms, each time anew, with the reader – a new intersubjective ground in an age of revolutionary print technology. By eliciting his ideal conceptions from a familiar urban sphere shared with the reader, moreover, the essayist bonds together the fragmented members of that sphere. Put another way, the relation of familiar and ideal in the Romantic familiar essay inheres not only in content but in practice, with the essayist creating in each essay his bond with his reader.

In 'A Flower for Your Window', published in *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* in 1834, Hunt writes that 'the commonest objects are only wonders at which habit has made us cease to wonder, and the marvellousness of which we may renew at pleasure, by *taking thought*'.[40] In 'A Dusty Day' (1835), he advises his reader, 'To think of something *superior* to the dust – whether grave or gay'.[41] In his own essays, the precept of exalting the familiar is put repeatedly into practice. In 'Autumnal Commencement of Fires' (1819), for instance, 'You may often see on no very rich mantelpiece a representative body of all the elements physical and intellectual . . . and underneath all, . . . the bright and ever-springing fire running up through them heavenwards, like hope through materiality.'[42] In 'Coaches' (1820): 'A hackney-coach always appeared to us the most quiescent of movables. Its horses and it, slumbering on a stand, are an emblem of all the patience in creation.'[43]

In contrast to Hunt's earnestness above – and Hazlitt's characteristically – Lamb's transformations from the mundane into the ideal are frequently informed by a sense of fun. In an essay on the contemporary comedian and caricaturist Joseph Munden, he writes:

> So the gusto of Munden antiquates and ennobles what it touches. His pots and his ladles are as grand and primal as the seething-pots and hooks seen in

[39] T. Milnes, 'Romantic essayism' in *The Testimony of Sense: Empiricism and the Essay from Hume to Hazlitt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 191–251. Milnes's work develops my argument that in the Romantic era, English philosophy migrates 'from the eighteenth-century "treatise" . . . into the more informal, more intimate writings of the belletrist' (Natarajan, 'The veil of familiarity', 30).

[40] L. Hunt, 'A flower for your window' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 12.

[41] L. Hunt, 'A dusty day' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 14.

[42] L. Hunt, 'Autumnal commencement of fires' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 20.

[43] L. Hunt, 'Coaches' in Priestley (ed.), *Selected Essays*, p. 132.

> old prophetic vision. A tub of butter, contemplated by him, amounts to a Platonic idea. He understands a leg of mutton in its quiddity. He stands wondering, amid the common-place materials of life, like primaeval man, with the sun and stars about him.[44]

Lamb's 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' (1823), announcing in its title the extraordinary content of the ordinary, sublimes not only pig but fruit: 'Pine-apple is great. She is indeed almost too transcendental . . . too ravishing for mortal taste.'[45] And there is a knowing wink here to the 'mortal taste' of John Milton's fruit announced in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* as the subject of the poem – or to the fruit that is more than a fruit.

In the same vein of urban sublimation, from Hazlitt's essays we may pick the description of the Covent Garden Theatre in 'The Free Admission' (1830) which expands past the walls of the theatre: 'Here, in small room, is crowded the map of human life.'[46] Or, we might cite his description of the mail coach in 'The Letter-Bell' (1831): 'Some persons think the sublimest object in nature is a ship launched on the bottom of the ocean: but give me, for my private satisfaction, the Mail-Coaches that pour down Piccadilly of any evening, tear up the pavement, and devour the way before them to the Land's-End!'[47] Hazlitt supplies us, too, with another memorable example of the idealising procedure, where the familiar subject gains an abstract or ideal quality through literary association. In 'The Fight', the losing boxer, the 'Gas-man' Tom Hickman, 'was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's *Inferno*'.[48] Lamb's schoolboy, fearfully anticipating a whipping in 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' (1820), is not far off: 'With his pale and frighted features, it was as if some of those disfigurements in Dante had seized upon him.'[49]

Such illustrations of the transition from the familiar subject to an ideal conception are repeatedly to be found, then, not only in Romantic poetry, but also in the genre of the urban familiar essay as it developed contemporaneously. Lamb describes this characteristic procedure of the urban familiar essay, in an unpublished review of the first volume of Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* (1821), as translation, declaring that his friend and fellow-essayist 'all along acts as his own interpreter, and is continually translating his thoughts out of

[44] C. Lamb, 'On the acting of Munden' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 149.
[45] C. Lamb, 'A dissertation upon roast pig' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 124.
[46] W. Hazlitt, 'The free admission' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 18, p. 369.
[47] W. Hazlitt, 'The letter-bell' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 18, p. 381.
[48] W. Hazlitt, 'The fight' in Howe (ed.), *Complete Works*, vol. 17, p. 83.
[49] C. Lamb, 'Christ's Hospital five and thirty years ago' in Lucas (ed.), *Works*, vol. 2, p. 17.

their original metaphysical obscurity into the language of the senses and of common observation'.[50] As a translator, the essayist is positioned at the crossroads of the ideal and the familiar, the abstract thought and the particular. The urban familiar essay itself emerges as a liminal genre that shows the ideal bearing of the familiar; as such, it offers itself as the consummate expression of our common humanity, the humanistic mode par excellence.

[50] C. Lamb, *Lamb as Critic*, ed. R. Park (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 307.

PART III

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ASSAYING CULTURE, EDUCATION, REFORM

20

The Essay and the Theme

THOMAS KARSHAN

A desperate student sits down to write their essay, and wonders, not for the first time, how it is done. Surely writing essays is as natural as thinking? Doesn't everyone know how? There are supposedly rules, and structures, but they turn out to be vague when you seek them out. Our student would be ill-advised to turn for help to literary essayists such as Montaigne, or Charles Lamb, or William Makepeace Thackeray, or Virginia Woolf, or Anne Carson. Their subjects are often unclear, concealed, intermittent, multiple; as often as not, they jump into the middle of things and do not signpost their arguments; they intersperse personal experience with individual speculation; and they ignore or deal capriciously with other writers on the same topic. To literary essayists, and their scholarly champions, the school essay is an embarrassing country cousin, bringing with it dusty memories of unglamorous classrooms and rote protocols, which, once mastered, have been gladly forgotten.

Tens of millions of students are asked to write essays each year, often with the implication that they should already know what an essay is, 'as if', as Peter Womack writes, 'intellectual activity produced essays the way a tree produces leaves'.[1] It is startling, therefore, to remember that the formal essay is an artificial rhetorical structure with a definite history, which has not taken hold as the default mode of pedagogical thought and assessment in other countries as it has done in Britain and America. In the contemporary Italian university, for example, few essays are written, and assessment is mostly oral. This chapter will begin from two questions. What is the relation of informal literary essays to the formal essays written at school and university? And what are the shared origins of these two forms? To address these questions, I draw attention back to the 'theme', the predecessor of the

[1] P. Womack, 'What are essays for?', *English in Education*, 27:2 (Summer 1993), 42.

modern pedagogical essay. John Florio, the first translator of Montaigne into English, points to this kinship when he imagines in his preface a cantankerous critic crying in response to Montaigne's *Essais*: 'Why but Essays are but men's school-themes pieced together; you might as well say, several texts.'[2]

This chapter will begin by setting out the origins, structures, and dominant concerns of the early modern Latin theme, which Montaigne's essays systematically subvert. It will discuss the handwritten English themes preserved in the 'Liber Aureus' of James Boyer, the teacher at Christ's Hospital in London of Leigh Hunt, Lamb, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, arguing that these themes achieve an impressive intensity of moral and psychological inquiry by working through the argumentative and oratorical patterns of the early modern theme. Ultimately, it shows how the modern pedagogical essay emerged by preserving the structures of the school-theme while replacing its reliance on ancient authority with an appeal to experience, research, and individual thought. At the same time, the Romantics, especially Lamb and Thomas De Quincey, drew on elements of the theme as they had been taught to write it – its intricate dialectical structures, its verbal mazes, and its bravura rhetorical flourishes – to counter the empiricist rationalism of the modern pedagogical essay. Like Montaigne before them, they gaily subverted the theme's moral values and argumentative order, and in particular the requirement to propound a single explicit subject or 'theme'.

What is a Theme?

Themes were short prose compositions, which at least until the late eighteenth century were usually written in Latin, and composed according to the principles of ancient rhetorical theory codified by Renaissance educational theorists, especially Desiderius Erasmus. They were the dominant form in

[2] J. Florio, 'To the courteous reader' in M. Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Florio, 3 vols. (London: Everyman, 1980), vol. 1, p. 10; spelling of this text modernised for clarity throughout. It is unclear whether Montaigne wrote the sort of themes in school that were common in English schools by the mid-sixteenth century. The nearest reference to them that Montaigne makes is in 'De l'institution des enfants' (*Essays*, vol. 1, p. 25). Montaigne refers to a *thème* as a text for translation, which is the sense the word still holds in French. This also appears to be the sense of *thema* in a 1583 account of the curriculum of Montaigne's school, the College of Guienne. See É. Vinet (ed.), *Schola Aquitanica, programme d'études du Collège* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1886), pp. 17, 69. However, this does not mean that Montaigne did not write original 'themes' in Florio's sense at school; he may have called them by another name, likely '*matière*', and it seems likely he was asked to write them during his study of law. G. Codina, *Aux sources de la pédagogie des Jésuites: le 'modus parisiensis'* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1968), p. 124.

which schoolchildren, and some university students, were trained to order their thoughts. Their logical and rhetorical structures were inculcated by a daily discipline, often reinforced by homework. The main subjects of the theme were education, self-discipline, and temperance, especially the education of the appetites. Formally the theme involved the discipline of sticking to the point, or 'theme' – themes being so-called because they were about a 'theme' usually given in the title or first line. As Florio implies, the theme was one of the main forms out of which essays emerged. Montaignian and Baconian essays frequently addressed typical theme subjects, such as education, marriage, wealth, and the virtues, and drew on the same stock of classical wisdom through quotation and example.

But it is equally true that essays, at least informal ones, were in many respects anti-themes – free in subject and form, written in conversational English, eccentrically structured, full of personal opinion, often digressive, and unbound by any requirement to clarify their 'theme' or subject. Florio raises this aspect of Montaigne's essays when, just after suggesting that they are too much like school-themes, he airs nearly the opposite complaint: 'that in the course of his discourses, or web of his Essays, or entitling of his chapters, he holdeth a disjointed, broken and gadding stile'.[3] Against this, Florio sends 'any dog-tooth'd' critic to a passage in 'Of Vanity' ('third book, folio 596', he punctiliously specifies) where Montaigne invokes 'some treatises in *Plutarch* where he forgets his theme, where the drift of his argument is not found but by incidence and chance, all stuffed with strange matter'.[4]

Because essays were associated with this indiscipline, they were not considered suitable for schoolchildren. There are a few textbooks before the nineteenth century that use the word 'essay' for the school compositions denoted by 'theme', but these appear to have been exceptions inspired by the example of Francis Bacon's essays. Ian Michael argues that in Britain the distinction between theme and essay became fuzzy in the 1830s, when the meaning of 'theme' broadened and the Baconian formal essay, as canonised in some *Spectator* pieces, became adopted as a model for school exercises; Peter Mack finds that the distinction persisted well into the later nineteenth century.[5] Eventually, in any event, the essay emerged as the dominant form of school and university composition and assessment that we now take for

[3] Florio, 'To the courteous reader' in Montaigne, *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 10.
[4] M. Montaigne, 'Of vanity' in *Essays*, vol. 3, p. 245.
[5] I. Michael, *The Teaching of English: From the Sixteenth Century to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 309. Peter Mack says that Michael's own instances argue for a later date: see Mack, 'Rhetoric and the essay', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 23:2 (Spring 1993), 47.

granted. But even to this day, the structure of the pedagogical essay hews close to the old theme. The key difference is that where themes sought knowledge and wisdom within classical literature and language, the modern pedagogical essay is an empiricist and individualist form whose materials are supposed to come from independent research, experience, and thought. Even so, 'theme' remained a normal word for prose compositions in American though not British classrooms until well into the 1960s, up to which time some distinction between a theme and an essay was still recognised.[6] In France, the term 'essai' has never been applied to a piece of original writing done in school or university. *Amplification* was the French term for theme. The nearest French equivalent for school essay is *dissertation*, which replaced *narrative* and *discours* in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[7] In Italy, *tema* remains the default term, only giving way at the highest school level to the *saggio breve*.[8]

Almost all the essayists we study, indeed all British and American writers up through the nineteenth century, grew up writing themes – at least once weekly, often daily. What the school essay is now, the theme was then: the background of both the formal and informal essay. If there is very little scholarship on the history of the theme – and none, except for Ian Michael's, on the relevance of the theme to the essay – it may be because themes, like most schoolwork, were generally discarded.[9] However we do have examples of themes by well-known writers. There is one attributed, with some debate, to John Milton: 'In the Morning Rise Up Early';[10] one by De Quincey ('A

[6] John McCall wrote in 1966 that '[a] theme is strongly indicative of the primary focus of the piece: a single major controlling idea. The essay, from the French essai, meaning to try or attempt, is an expression of the writer's opinion on any topic. In essence, an expository piece of writing is basically all three, although theme is probably the most accurate term and the one that will be used here.' J. McCall, *How to Write Themes and Essays* (1966; New York: Arco/Macmillan, 1989), p. 44.

[7] A. Chervel, 'L'invention de la dissertation littéraire dans l'enseignement secondaire français', *Paedagogica Historica*, 40 (June 2004), 261–77, and Chervel, *Histoire de l'enseignement du français du XVII^e^ au XX^e^ siècle* (Paris: Retz, 2006), esp. pp. 638–41.

[8] For an account of the distinction between the short essay and the theme in Italian education, see [Zanichelli online], 'La differenza fra saggio breve e tema', https://online.scuola.zanichelli.it/grammabilita-files/extra-arancione-base/H7/H7_differenza_saggio_breve_e_tema_p807.pdf (accessed 10 July 2023). I am grateful to Lellida Marinelli, Valentina Vinciarelli, and Paolo Bugliani for discussing with me the contemporary Italian pedagogical essay.

[9] The fullest account of theme-writing in sixteenth-century England remains T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), esp. vol. 1, ch. 4, and vol. 2, ch. 39.

[10] J. Milton, 'In the morning rise up early' in W. Poole (ed.), *The Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol. 11: *Manuscript Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 377–86.

Thing is Not Beautiful because it is Great, but Great, because it is Beautiful');[11] three by Charles Dodgson, the future Lewis Carroll ('A Beautiful Face is a Silent Recommendation', 'Nothing Aids which may not also Injure us', 'To Despise Fame is to Despise Merit');[12] and one by the young James Joyce, 'Trust Not Appearances', likely written in 1897 or 1898, which, but for being in English, could reasonably be mistaken for a sixteenth-century theme, demonstrating the continuity of theme writing over 400 or so years of glacial pedagogical change.[13] We also have Boyer's cache of themes written between 1786 and 1799.[14]

Three questions emerge from an investigation into the relation between the essay and the theme. First, what do we mean by 'themes' in literature? The question tends to be invisible precisely because the theme is such a ubiquitous term and tool of literary study. Recent scholarship on 'thematics' does not recognise that until the twentieth century 'theme' always meant a formal exercise as well as a topic (theme) often accounted at the head of such written exercises.[15] If the school-theme shaped the way literature came to be read, has it also influenced how modern literary essayists, novelists, and even poets express and combine themes? Second, if we tend to imagine that educated people think in essays, might the structures of reason that we take for granted be traceable to the thematic structures taught in school? Boyer's teaching seeped so deeply into his pupils' thoughts that, according to Hunt, Coleridge 'said he dreamt of the master all his life, and that his dreams are horrible'.[16] Where themes build a picture of consciousness in which reason climbs from argument to argument, carrying a single idea ever upwards to a conclusion, the Romantic essay gives us something more like De Quincey's dreams in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) modelled on

[11] T. De Quincey, 'Oxford Latin exercise, c. 1803–8' in B. Symonds (ed.), *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, Vol. 1: *Writings, 1799–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 77–9.

[12] M.N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 535–8.

[13] J. Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. K. Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–4.

[14] The 'Liber Aureus' is kept in the British Library: BM MS Ashley 3506. There are three volumes; the themes are in the third.

[15] See W. Sollers (ed.), *The Return of Thematic Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), and C. Bremond, J. Landy, and T. Pavel (eds.), *Thematics: New Approaches* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), neither of which shows any awareness of the school-theme.

[16] As reported by Leigh Hunt in 'A schoolmaster of the old leaven', first published in the *New Monthly Magazine* (1825), reprinted in an expanded version in Hunt's *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, 3 vols. (Paris: A. & W. Galignani, 1828); here, vol. 3, p. 41. It was then republished in *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries*, 3 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1850).

Piranesi's drawings as Coleridge described them to him: 'you perceived a staircase', but, 'following the stairs a little further . . . you perceive it come to a sudden abrupt termination, without any balustrade, and allowing no step onwards to him who had reached the extremity, except into the depths below'.[17] Those nightmares inspire a third question: if the literary essay systematically parodies the theme, what picture of the unconscious does that leave us with?

The Early Modern Theme

The theme derives from the practice of declamation in the ancient world, in which students of rhetoric would write and orate on what Quintilian describes as 'fictitious themes in imitation of the questions that arise in the lawcourts or deliberative assemblies'.[18] Such declamations were a form of pedagogical play meant to train children in the oratorical skills necessary to promote republican liberty. The *thema* was not a technical term for the rhetorical exercise, only for the proposition, or prompt.[19] In Erasmus's writing, too, the theme is not yet the word for the writing exercise, but only for its subjects, which could range from ancient history through mythology, fable, and what we might now call scientific fact ('the magnet draws iron to itself, naphtha fire').[20] In the early fourteenth century, Italian grammarians began to use the plural *themata* for 'vernacular passages assigned to pupils for Latin translation', and by the sixteenth century *theme* had become the established term in English for such exercises as original compositions.[21]

[17] T. De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. B. Milligan (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 78.

[18] Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), vol. 1, 2.4.41.

[19] See *Institutio Oratoria* (4.2.28) quoted in C.T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879), *s.v.*, 'thema': 'certain points or themes as we call them are put forward for discussion, outside which our refutation must not go, and consequently a *statement of facts* always follows the *exordium* (quibus certa quaedam ponuntur (quae themata dicimus) praeter quae nihil est diluendum, ideoque narratio prohoemio semper subiungitur)'. *Thema* here has a technical sense – it is the proposition put forward for discussion – and it also has a delimiting role: it is the set of facts or case beyond which one should not digress.

[20] D. Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 24: *Literary and Educational Writings 2*, ed. C.R. Thompson, trans. B.I. Knott and B. McGregor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 676.

[21] R. Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 111, 115–16.

Themes could be written in verse, and the word also described translations. Sometimes themes were declaimed. For the most part, though, themes in Britain were prose compositions of about 300 words in length. While their main purpose originally was to teach children to write good Latin, from the early nineteenth century they served to do the same for English. The student was expected to draw on the six-part structure of a Ciceronian oration and to deploy a range of arguments ('topics' or 'places') and rhetorical devices. Schoolchildren were often asked to identify these in the margins of their theme. The Ciceronian structures were to be filled ('stuffed' as was sometimes said) with phrases and sentiments from ancient writers. Erasmus prescribed that they should be culled from independent reading and entered in a 'commonplace book', which is why themes were sometimes called commonplaces.[22] In practice, students tended to draw on collections of sayings either published for this purpose ('Helps of Themes', they were sometimes called) or handed on from pupil to pupil in dog-eared manuscripts.[23] In the schedule of learning, themes came after epistles, but before formal orations, and bore much in common with these neighbours.[24] The subject of themes was mainly the virtues and the vices, and one of their chief aims was to instruct children in how to reason about virtue in a range of real and imagined circumstances.

The six-part rhetorical structure consisted of the *exordium*, or appeal to the reader's attention; the *narratio*, or thesis statement, in which the theme was set out (sometimes 'proposition' or in French, 'propos'); the *partitio*, or structuring of the argument; the *confirmatio*, or arguments for the case; the *refutatio*, or refutation of counterarguments; and the *conclusio*, or conclusion, tying together the main points. There is a striking parallel with the structure recommended for contemporary student essays, which includes: (1) 'hook'; (2) 'present your thesis statement'; (3) 'map your essay's structure'; (4) 'maintain the thesis statement'; (5) 'outline the debate'; and (6) 'tie together your main points'.[25]

[22] On the relation between commonplace practice and the essay, see A. Vine's, 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3).

[23] See M. Adams, *Teaching Classics in English Schools, 1500–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 86.

[24] On the letter as an essayistic genre, see E.T. Bannet ('Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays') and on essay as performance, see P. Reynolds ('Performance and the Irish essay'), both in this volume (Chs. 8 and 42, respectively).

[25] Cf. J. Caulfield, 'How to structure an essay', *Scribbr*, www.scribbr.com/academic-essay/essay-structure/ (accessed 11 April 2022). See also Peter Mack's comments on this in 'Rhetoric and the essay', 41.

Themes also drew on various elements of the classical educational scheme called the 'progymnasmata', best known to Renaissance educationalists through the Greek pedagogue Aphthonius. In the fifth century, Aphthonius set out fourteen exercises, one of which, the *chreia*, is a major source of the theme. In it a statement (such as 'Isocrates said the root of education is bitter but the fruits are sweet') would be discussed according to the structure of 'praise, paraphrase, cause, contrary, comparison, example, testimony of the ancients, brief epilogue'.[26] It was often combined with the six-part structure of classical oratory into a seven-part structure which had established itself by the eighteenth century as 'Proposition; Reason; Confirmation; Simile; Example; Testimony; Conclusion'.[27]

John Brinsley's teaching guide, *Ludus literarius* (1627), shows that at higher educational levels, the theme became a more sophisticated exercise. Boys were asked to analyse their own or others' themes, identifying the arguments: 'Cause, Effect, Contrarie, Similitude, Example, Testimonie'. They were to consider all potential objections and whatever 'absurdities' might follow from the theme. In capital letters in the left margin, they were to identify the parts of the theme: *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, *peroratio*. And in the right margin, they were to set out the heads of the argument, '*à Causa, à Contrario*'. In the text or farther to the right, they were to note tropes and figures, such as metonymy (*Metonymia Efficientis*) in abbreviated forms: '*Met. Effic.*' They were to analyse ambiguous language, or 'expound the doubtfull words or phrases'. And if the theme was a 'proposition' (such as 'Children are to obey their Parents'), they were to organise their 'reasons' into a hierarchy, moving from the strongest to the weakest, and back to the strongest.[28]

The art of the theme was to develop, amplify, and test a theme (topic or text, usually a classical quotation) by inverting, angling, and expanding its reach, while maintaining coherence. What seemed so startling about Montaigne's essays was not only that they rejected Ciceronian structures and stylistic norms, but that their theme seemed to be missing.[29] Anticipating his reader, Montaigne had warned: 'It is the inattentive reader who loses my subject, not I. Some word about it will always be found off in a corner, which

[26] Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, trans. G.A. Kennedy (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 95–6.
[27] Michael, *The Teaching of English*, p. 309.
[28] J. Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius: or, The Grammar Schoole* (London: T. Man, 1612), ch. 13.
[29] R. Griffin, 'Title, structure and theme of Montaigne's "Des coches"', *Modern Language Notes*, 82 (1967), 285. Griffin attributes this insight to Pierre Villey. See also H. Genz, 'The relationship of title to content in Montaigne's essay, "Des boyteux"', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 28:3 (1966), 633–5.

will not fail to be sufficient, though it takes little room.'[30] The Montaignian theme was often not stated at the beginning, but in the middle, the end, or in an innocuous corner of the discourse, and often there were many intersecting themes.[31] Some early annotators sought to clarify the theme of each essay by writing one down as a heading.[32]

The most extreme case is 'Of Coaches', which begins abruptly with the impossibility of knowing the main cause of things, transitions bizarrely to the question of why we bless those who sneeze, dwells on sea-sickness, passes to the broader matter of fear, twists off into escape and flight, pauses to contemplate whether folly and wisdom are necessarily opposed, and only then reaches the supposed theme as part of a broader comparison about modes of transport. As we lurch back and forth with Montaigne's mind as it darts around, we might be tempted to take the theme as motion rather than coaches. This rejection of oratorical structure and thematic clarity is programmatic for the Montaignian essay; he writes: 'Cicero's way of writing, and every other similar way, seems to me boring. For his prefaces, definitions, partitions, etymologies consume the greater part of his work; what life and marrow there is, is smothered by his long-winded preparations.'[33]

The Christ's Hospital Theme: Coleridge, Hunt, Lamb

We can gain a rare picture of the reality of theme-writing in the classroom of James Boyer at Christ's Hospital. In an essay first published in 1825, Hunt offers a vivid, if unflattering, view:

> They were upon a given subject, generally a moral one, such as ambition, or the love of money: and the regular process in the manufacture was this. You wrote out the subject very fairly at top. *Quid non mortalia*, &c. or *Crescit amor nummi*. Then the ingenious thing was to repeat this apophthegm in as many words and round-about phrases as possible; which took up a good bit of the

[30] I quote from Donald Frame's translation because Florio's version of this passage is unhelpfully obscure. See D.M. Frame (trans.), *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), p. 1232.

[31] For more on this aspect of Montaigne, see D. Knop, 'Montaigne on rhetoric' in P. Desan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Montaigne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 401ff; and R. Sayce, *The Essays of Montaigne: A Critical Exploration* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), pp. 263–84.

[32] For early modern readers' annotations, see W.M. Hamlin, *Montaigne's English Journey: Reading the* Essays *in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 18.

[33] M. Montaigne, 'Of books' in Frame (trans.), *The Complete Essays*, p. 518.

> paper. Then you attempted to give a reason or two, *why amor nummi* was bad; or on what accounts heroes ought to eschew ambition; – after which naturally came a few examples, got out of Plutarch, or the Selectae e Profanis; and the happy moralist concluded with signing his name. Somebody speaks of schoolboys going about to one another on these occasions, and asking for a little sense. That was not the phrase with us; it was a thought. – P— , can you give me a thought?' C— , for God's sake, help me to a thought, for it only wants ten minutes to eleven.[34]

Yet, turning to the themes in Boyer's 'Liber Aureus', we find they belie Hunt's disparaging memories and more nearly bear out Coleridge's celebration of Boyer's teaching in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817) as the instruction of moral seriousness, intellectual sophistication, and psychological penetration.[35] The subject of Boyer's themes was, as often as not, education itself, and writing them was an education in carefully structured reasoning on the causes and effects of virtue and vice. Coleridge's theme dated November 1788 derives from Juvenal: '*Nil dictu fœdum, visuque hæc limina tangat, / Intra quae puer est*' (Let no foul word or sight cross the threshold within which there is a child).[36] Coleridge begins by expounding the proposition: 'The tender age of Childhood requires the utmost care and attention.' He then gives a first cause: 'Young minds receive strong impressions from every object, that surrounds them.' From here, he passes on to interlinked subordinate causes: 'For every object that surrounds them is a Novelty to them, and must therefore catch their whole attention.' There follows another constituent argument: 'And as their own judgement cannot discern right from wrong, it becomes incumbent on the Parent to remove all things, that are not calculated to impress the mind with ideas of Virtue.' He goes on to amplify his theme, threading it through contraries: 'And though maturer years may shew the folly, and wickedness of this or any other vice, yet Habit will often have too securely ingrafted it on their nature to suffer it to be educated'. Finally, he expands its implications: 'Nor when grown up to the knowledge of right and wrong do they demand a less watchful care.'[37]

[34] Hunt, 'A schoolmaster of the old leaven' in *Lord Byron*, vol. 3, pp. 49–50.

[35] S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* in Coleridge, *The Major Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 159–60.

[36] Juvenal, *Satires* in S.M. Braund (ed. and trans.), *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 14.44–5.

[37] J. Boyer, 'Liber Aureus', vol. 3, ff. 5–6. Coleridge's themes have now been printed as 'School exercises' in H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson (eds.), *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 11: *Shorter Works and Fragments*, 2 parts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), part 1, pp. 3–11, for this and the following quotations.

Above all, Boyer's themes were designed to make pupils write their way through the complexity of virtue and vice: how a vice may resemble a virtue, how a virtue pursued may swell into a vice, how the virtues must be kept in balance. One pupil named Allen says in his theme of January 1792 that 'the love of praise' is poisonous to virtue because of 'its specious resemblance to true Merit', while another, Robert Favell, points out in a theme of November 1794 that 'every virtue of which a man can be possessed, is set off to the best advantage by Modesty'. We can infer that this question of whether a person can be possessed of their own virtues was vital to Boyer, from a theme he set Le Grice on 5 October 1793, based on some lines from Ovid: *Nam genus et proavos, et quae non fecimus ipsi, / Vix ea nostra voco'* (We can scarcely call birth and ancestry and what we have not ourselves done, our own). But he subtly altered them, replacing *proavos* with *virtus*, so that the theme declares that we cannot call even our *virtus* (strength, virtue) our own.

As exercises in morality, Boyer's themes provided an education in the management of the appetites. The key word was 'temperance', the theme of Coleridge's first theme, dated 6 June 1788. Its opposite was 'luxury', the subject of his final theme, dated 11 March 1791, from Virgil: '*Nescia mens hominum . . . / servare modum rebus sublata secundis'* (O mind of man, knowing not how to keep bounds when uplifted with favouring fortune).[38] 'Want', writes Coleridge, 'is the natural consequence of Luxury. And he, who has reduced himself to Poverty by his inordinate love of Pleasures, is prepared to adopt any means, which promise a continuance of them.'[39] It is a mark of the theme's ancestry in the republicanism of ancient Rome that this luxury throughout Boyer's themes is closely associated with empire. Hunt comments in his memoir of Boyer's teaching that 'there was just then a little perplexity, arising from the free doctrines inculcated by the books we learned, and the new and alarming echo of them struck on the ears of power by the French Revolution'.[40] Luxury in Boyer's classroom was a matter not only of politics, but of health of mind. In a theme of December 1794, Favell writes:

> To indulge in splendid reveries is perhaps the disease of young & ardent minds. There is indeed a luxury in these delusions; but it is a poisoned

[38] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. H.R. Fairclough, revised by G.P. Goold, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vol. 2, 10.501–2.
[39] Coleridge, 'School exercises', vol. 11, part 1, p. 11.
[40] Hunt, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, p. 135.

> luxury. . . . we habituate ourselves to the impotence of *Wishing*, rather than to the energies of *Will*, & dream away life in thinking on the End, when we should be employed about the means.[41]

We can see these elements drawn together in a theme by Coleridge dated 19 January 1791, on a theme from Juvenal: '*Quod fas / Atque nefas, tandem incipiunt sentire peractis / Criminibus*' (They only begin to feel what is right and wrong when it has been committed).[42] The eighteen-year-old Coleridge took up this invitation to reflect on the blindness of anticipation and the distemper of mere reason, developing it into a Gothic essay on the psychology of insatiable regret that would come to fruition in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798).[43]

Antiformalities: The Romantic Essay and the Theme

Hunt's and Coleridge's memories of their schooldays in Boyer's classroom are, if anything, exceeded by those of Lamb in 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital' (1813), 'Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago' (1820), and, less directly, in 'The Old and New Schoolmaster' (1821). The last casts light on the conflicting pedagogical visions informing the theme and the essay in the early nineteenth century, pointing to the two opposite directions in which the essay would then develop. Lamb's New Schoolmaster seizes every passing experience as an opportunity for inquiry, disquisition, and information – about coaches, cattle, 'the cheapness of cottons this spring', London real estate value – and all this while 'it did not appear that he took any interest, either, in such inquiries, for their own sake'. This tireless empiricist is the opposite of those such as Boyer, the 'fine old Pedagogues; the breed, long since extinct, of the Lilys, and the Linacres: who believing that all learning was contained in the languages they taught, and despising every other acquirement as superficial and useless, came to their task as a sport!' The Old Schoolmaster dreamed his life away, 'revolving in a perpetual circle of declensions, conjugations, syntaxes, and prosodies'. Lamb quotes the claim that 'a great treasury of wisdom of knowledge' is contained in the ancient languages, which comes from the preface to 'Colet's Accidence', a part of the Latin textbook by Erasmus, John Colet, and William Lily used by

[41] Favell, 'Liber Aureus', vol. 3, f. 25. The words in italics are underlined in the original manuscript.

[42] Juvenal, *Satires*, 13.237–9.

[43] Coleridge, 'School exercises', vol. 11, part 1, p. 10.

nearly all English schoolboys from the early sixteenth century up to the nineteenth century.[44]

Against that vision, Lamb cites as the authority for his New Schoolmaster 'the famous Tractate on Education addressed to Mr. Hartlib'.[45] He refers to Milton's essay *Of Education* (1644), which inveighs against 'forcing the empty wits of Children to compose Theams, Verses and Orations', matters not 'to be wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the Nose, or the plucking of untimely fruit'.[46] Milton's was one of two texts frequently quoted by opponents of Latin themes, the other being John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), which argued that children should not be writing about matters of which they had no experience: 'the poor Lad, who wants Knowledge of these Things he is to speak of, which is to be had only from Time and Observation, must set his Invention on the Rack to say something where he knows nothing; which is a sort of *Egyptian* Tyranny, to bid them make Bricks who have not yet any of the Materials'.[47] Locke also lent his authority to popularising the English theme.[48]

This pressure of empiricism, and the associated hostility to rhetoric, helps to explain the gradual displacement of the school-theme by the school essay over the course of the nineteenth century. The old Erasmian theme made no sense in a pedagogy dominated by Lockean precepts. In its place there emerged the modern school essay, which preserves unnamed many of the oratorical structures of the theme, while discarding the practices of invention by which theme writers found their material in prior authorities and in language. A full account of the birth of the modern pedagogical essay out of the school-theme would require another chapter. Parts of that history are touched on in Jon Klancher's chapter in this volume, 'The Academic Essay: Rhetoric and Pedagogy' (Chapter 21). In what remains of this chapter, I shall turn instead to how the theme was transformed into one kind of modern literary essay by the Romantic essayists.

[44] C. Lamb, 'The old and new schoolmaster' in A. Phillips (ed.), *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), pp. 106–8.
[45] Ibid., p. 109.
[46] J. Milton, 'Of education' in E. Sirluck (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. 2: *1643–1648* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 372–3.
[47] J. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. J.W. Yolton and J.S. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 228–9. For one example of these lines being quoted, see J. Clarke, *An Essay upon Education of Youth in Grammar-Schools*, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Hitch, 1740), pp. 72–3.
[48] Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 229.

An insight into this transformation can be found by returning to Hunt's remarks on Boyer's themes. The passage that I have already quoted in fact begins by calling them essays, and Ian Michael takes this to indicate that by 1825 the distinction between the theme and the essay was no longer clear.[49] I propose, rather, that it suggests that Hunt sees how the essays that he, Lamb, and Coleridge would go on to write developed out of Boyer's themes. In his *Autobiography* Hunt remarks, 'I began to think that when Boyer crumpled up and chucked away my "themes" in a passion, he had not done justice to the honest weariness of my antiformalities, and to their occasional evidences of something better.' That 'something better' is a clue to the thinking of Hunt and Lamb, and other Romantic essayists, as they turned the theme on its head, inspired by the lighter, more immethodical *Spectator* pieces, and by Montaigne. Hunt recalls reading Montaigne in Lamb's library, where both he and Lamb found a model rejecting the Ciceronian structure of the theme, its heightened rhetoric, its obeisance to ancient authority, and its assumption that the world and the mind can be neatly divided up into subjects which match the division and structures of oratory.[50]

Lamb's contrast between the Old and the New Schoolmaster is not made to the latter's advantage. Lamb implies that his essays will be the opposite of those well-informed, methodical productions of the modern school: 'One of these professors, upon my complaining that these little sketches of mine were any thing but methodical, and that I was unable to make them otherwise, kindly offered to instruct me in the method by which young gentlemen in *his* seminary were taught to compose English themes.'[51] Confusingly, Lamb here uses the word 'theme' for the new methodical school essay, as contrasted with his 'little sketches', which William Hazlitt compared to 'Erasmus's Colloquies or a fine piece of modern Latin'.[52] Against an emerging empiricism, the Romantic antiformalist essay nostalgically embraced the rhetorical playfulness of the early modern theme and its underlying assumption that truth is to be found in language.

That such essays play extravagantly with the commonplaces and oratorical structures of the theme would have been obvious to many readers up to the 1920s, when knowledge of theme writing fell away. In a crucial if neglected article of 1921, Charles Whitmore pointed out that we find in many literary

[49] Michael, *The Teaching of English*, p. 310.
[50] Hunt, *Autobiography*, vol. 1, pp. 254, 288, 123, 290.
[51] Lamb, 'The old and new schoolmaster', p. 110.
[52] W. Hazlitt, 'On familiar style' in P.P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1967), vol. 8, p. 145.

essays the 'inversion of a normal expository process' since 'they expound a matter seemingly too trivial or absurd for serious exposition, or they expound it in an unexpected and whimsical way'.[53] We can find examples of such mock-rhetorical structures in Lamb's 'The Two Races of Men' (1820) as a mock division; 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' (1822) as a mock thesis; and 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers' (1822) as a mock encomium. Or, in the twentieth century, we can find Virginia Woolf's 'Street Haunting' (1927) as a mock encomium on a pencil, and Isaiah Berlin's 'The Hedgehog and the Fox' (1953) as a mock division.

Where themes typically espoused the management of appetite, the essay as it evolved in Romantic essays is, often, a celebration of intemperance. Lamb embraces the persona of Edax (the glutton) and wrote of himself in 'Confessions of a Drunkard' (1813); De Quincey is known for his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). Where themes condemned debt, Lamb praises the borrower over the lender. Where themes praised rising early, Hunt writes wearily of the miseries of 'Getting up on Cold Mornings' (1820). Where themes celebrated marriage, Lamb responds with 'A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People' (1811). And where the theme celebrated education and obedience to educational institutions, Lamb and Hunt mock Boyer's educational schemes.

Still more subversive are those essays which follow Montaigne in teasing at the very idea of any theme at all. Hazlitt's 'On the Pleasures of Hating' (1826) expands the theme to such absurd proportions that it swallows the whole world into it. Others approach the world via a theme of almost complete triviality, as in Lamb's 'A Chapter on Ears' (1821), an imitation of Montaigne on thumbs. In 'A Chapter on Hats' (1820), Hunt initiates a tradition that would be taken up by William Makepeace Thackeray in his essay 'Autour de Mon Chapeau' (1863), and G.K. Chesterton in 'On Running after One's Hat' (1908), the latter a nice metaphor for the essayist running after the elusive theme. In Thackeray's 'On a Chalk Mark on the Door' (1861) and Woolf's 'The Mark on the Wall' (1917), the theme serves as an arbitrary centre for meditation. The essayist may even make a theme out of the difficulty of joining and balancing many themes together in one essay, as Hazlitt does in 'The Indian Jugglers' (1821), and Hunt in 'On the Graces and Anxieties of Pig-Driving' (1828).

[53] C. Whitmore, 'The field of the essay', *PMLA*, 36:4 (December 1921), 559. See K.S. Homar, '"Rehearsing continually the part of the past": Lamb's Elia essays and the classical curriculum at Christ's Hospital', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53:1 (Spring 2014), 79–101.

De Quincey's Elements of Rhetoric

Of all the Romantic essayists, it was De Quincey who played most dramatically with the theme. His 1828 essay 'Elements of Rhetoric' describes the classical world of rhetorical play that he encountered in the themes and declamations he was taught to write at Oxford, where the point was not 'proving or disproving' anything but merely 'finding such arguments for any given thesis as . . . gave it a colorable support'. The pleasure of such rhetoric was 'to hang upon one's own thoughts as an object of conscious interest, to play with them, to watch and pursue them through a maze of inversions, evolutions, and harlequin changes'. De Quincey writes:

> The two opposite forces of eloquent passion and rhetorical fancy [are] brought into an exquisite equilibrium, approaching, receding – attracting, repelling – blending, separating – chasing and chased, as in a fugue, and again lost in a delightful interfusion, so as to create a middle species of composition, more various and stimulating to the understanding than pure eloquence, more gratifying to the affections than naked rhetoric.[54]

We can glimpse De Quincey already mastering such rhetorical fugues in the Latin theme that survives from his undergraduate days at Oxford, written sometime between 1803 and 1808.[55] The theme of that theme is *Non id, quod magnum est, pulchrum est; sed, quod pulchrum, magnum*: 'A thing is not beautiful, because it is great; but great, because it is beautiful.' De Quincey begins not with the proposition but its antithesis, holding our understanding suspended as he evokes the gloriousness of wicked actions: 'not unfrequently in deeds of the greatest turpitude a deadly splendour has shone forth from the mind striking terror into the nations'.[56] It is only then, having acknowledged that there is much that is great but not good, glorious and yet not quite beautiful, that he turns aside from the labyrinth of equivocations he had flickeringly conjured, inverting his theme and discovering arguments for the greatness of virtue in the airy ambitions from which it springs: the 'rigid restraint of unbridled impulse' and the noble effects virtue exerts by 'rendering her votaries akin to some more exalted nature'. He concludes by leaving us in a mist of distinctions: 'Although, therefore, the mass of men, not being themselves partakers of greatness, have often misconstrued the definition of true glory, and hence have misnamed many most celebrated actions – yet there are some

[54] T. De Quincey, 'Elements of rhetoric' in G. Lindop, B. Symonds, et al. (eds.), *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, 21 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000–3), vol. 6, pp. 157, 163, 169.

[55] De Quincey, 'Oxford Latin exercise, c. 1803–8', pp. 77–9.

[56] Ibid., p. 78.

wicked deeds that may truly be termed great; but there are no manifestly beautiful actions that are not at the same time great also.'[57]

What De Quincey miniaturises in his Oxford theme and vividly describes in 'Elements of Rhetoric', he realises at length across *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), and *The English Mail-Coach* (1849). The situation of the *Confessions* is the space between school, with its 'dull translation of moral essays', and the rhetorical performances of Oxford.[58] As such, it becomes, like Lamb's 'Oxford in the Vacation' (1820), a relaxation of the order and temperance of the theme, whose characteristics De Quincey frequently travesties with mock divisions, mock reasons, and mock catalogues. De Quincey presents his wild dream-states as the ruins of that waking reason constituted by themes.[59] On Oxford Street he experiences the shadows of that reason that Oxford embodies, in wild dreams which he represents as broken, collapsing, or tantalising staircases. Playing on the musical sense of the word 'theme', De Quincey presents the final section of *The English Mail-Coach* as a 'Dream-Fugue: On the above theme of sudden death'. Looking back from the *Suspiria*, he thinks of the *Confessions* as a set of musical variations and digressions around the violent directness of the theme:

> The true object in my 'Opium Confessions' is not the naked physiological theme – on the contrary, that is the ugly pole, the murderous spear, the halbert – but those wandering musical variations upon the theme – those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb up with bells and blossoms round about the arid stock; ramble away from it at times with perhaps too rank a luxuriance.[60]

In *The English Mail-Coach*, De Quincey would take this principle to its limit, seizing with violent avidity on hints in the most anti-thematic of Montaigne's essays, 'On Coaches'. With mock pedantry he unfolds one by one the contradictions across which Montaigne rides in the vehicle of his coach theme: luxurious play and luxuriant violence, soft sentimentality and studied cruelty. The digressions extruding luxuriantly around the theme are now imagined as young men sitting outside the mail coach as it rides away from Oxford, so that theme and similitude, thing and metaphor, twist and invert into one another. In *Suspiria de Profundis*, De Quincey had boasted of his 'electric aptitude for seizing analogies, and by means of those aërial pontoons

[57] Ibid., p. 79. [58] De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, p. 9.

[59] For more on De Quincey's dreams and the essay, see M. Russett's 'Forms of thought: dreams, reverie, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 18).

[60] De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. On mock-thematic structures, see pp. 91, 95; on Piranesian structures, p. 78; for the dream-fugue, p. 236; for the final quotation, p. 97.

passing over like lightning from one topic to another', and that aptitude is now rendered visible in the appalling speed of the mail coach and the astonishing communicative systems of Britain.[61]

At the climactic moment of the essay, its two governing themes – the glory of motion and the tenderness of love – are made to smash up against one another, as the galloping mail coach collides into an unsuspecting pair of young lovers. De Quincey invokes the leopards from Montaigne's 'On Coaches' when he compares the ferocious playfulness latent in domesticated leopard cubs with the way that 'the caprices, the gay arabesques, and the lovely floral luxuriations of dreams, betray a shocking tendency to pass into finer maniacal splendours', so that the mail coachman is transfigured by De Quincey's nightmare into 'the form of a crocodile'.[62] De Quincey's writings thus offer us the most dramatic and explicit illustration we have of some broader truths about much modern literature, whether essay or fiction: that it draws on, bends, and subverts the argumentative structures of the formal essay, offering us an irrational tangle of themes, and a game of hide-and-seek with its subjects.

What we can say about literature, we can say also about the mind, which Sigmund Freud famously pictured as a 'mystic writing-pad' or palimpsest of layers of writing overlaid one upon another, whose central subject is never easily or altogether found.[63] De Quincey anticipated this metaphor in *Suspiria*, offering a picture of consciousness as a grotesquerie of intertwining and colliding themes, and as the ruins of that rationality that the theme helped to construct:

> Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, O reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. And yet in reality not one has been extinguished. And if, in the vellum palimpsest, lying amongst the other *diplomata* of human archives or libraries, there is any thing fantastic or which moves to laughter, as oftentimes there is in the grotesque collisions of those successive themes, having no natural connexion, which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll, yet, in our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain, there are not and cannot be such incoherencies.[64]

[61] T. De Quincey, 'Suspiria de profundis' in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 121.
[62] T. De Quincey, 'The English mail-coach' in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, p. 209.
[63] S. Freud, 'A note upon the "mystic writing-pad"' (1925) in J. Strachey et al. (eds.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), vol. 19, pp. 226–32.
[64] De Quincey, 'Suspiria de profundis', p. 150.

21

The Academic Essay: Rhetoric and Pedagogy

JON KLANCHER

Much writing on the essay seeks to define the genre amidst other public, literary, or intellectual genres by emphasising its loose-limbed, exploratory, often personal, and sometimes fanciful forms. But the academic essay has usually not fitted these patterns, appearing often to be a straitened genre prescribing rigid procedures and resulting in conformity to university expectations for expository prose.[1] This chapter will show a rather different side to the academic essay in Britain by investigating its troubled evolution from norms of classical rhetoric associated with England's higher education to the professionalising discourses and disciplines of the Scottish universities and their American counterparts. Classical rhetoric survived longest at Oxford and Cambridge, while it was most challenged by new thinking about language and communication forged by Dissenting or Presbyterian professors and students at the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. In the mid-nineteenth century, the old Oxbridge preferment system was levelled by new measures designed to implement meritocracy, particularly public examinations for civil service positions in Britain and India. Such exams tended to favour an information-based mastery of the complexities of British imperial rule over proficiency in the canon of classical education. To meet their demands, new models of student writing were forged across Britain, putting the essay at an educational crossroads of competing pathways for the nation's future.

This chapter will examine the shift from methods of invention and commonplacing derived from the tradition of humanist teaching to educational strategies that reduced the genre of the academic essay to the five-paragraph compositional workhorse it was becoming by 1900.[2] It will also

[1] See T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme', immediately preceding this chapter in this volume (Ch. 20), for a discussion of how the Montaignian literary essay evolved from the academic essay (or school-theme) and, in some ways, returned to it.

[2] See, also, A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 3).

show how the transfer of this pedagogy from Scottish to American universities by the early twentieth century led to telling and still unresolved contradictions between rhetorical formulae and the literary essay's personal voice, between the social-scientific mandate to prove and the belletristic desire to explore, experiment, and self-reflect. I shall argue that these essayistic ideals were not free-floating principles but socially and institutionally embedded practices and programmes with long-lasting implications for the essay's place in a modern liberal education.

The Lost Art of Rhetoric

Early modern scholars have long argued that modern prose, including the essay, was a means of breaking with classical rhetoric. The Ciceronian or so-called Asiatic style, with its periodic sentences and copious figurality, came to be opposed in the seventeenth century to the 'Attic' or plain style associated variously with Puritan preachers, periodical writers like Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, and professors of the Royal Society.[3] In an important rethinking of the debate between Morris W. Croll and his critics on what led to the rise of modern prose, John Guillory has argued that to advocate the plain style was also to call for 'a reorientation of the genre system in favour of discursive forms such as the essay and the treatise'.[4] If the modern essay of Michel de Montaigne and Francis Bacon grew from the bones of classical rhetoric, the transformation did not happen all at once, and it was most protracted in the schools, lasting into the early nineteenth century. Textbooks like the often-reprinted *The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy* (1739) by John Holmes or John Walker's *The Teacher's Assistant* (1801) prescribed 'themes' based on the seven-part Ciceronian scheme: 'Proposition, Reason, Confirmation, Simile, Example, Testimony, and Conclusion'.[5]

At the same time, there were ample cases of teaching Addison and Steele's *Spectator* and other literary periodical essays in schoolbooks like James

[3] M.W. Croll, '"Attic prose" in the seventeenth century' (1921) in J.M. Patrick and R.O. Evans (eds.), *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm: Essays by Morris W. Croll* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 54.

[4] J. Guillory, 'Mercury's words: the end of rhetoric and the beginning of prose', *Representations*, 138:1 (2017), 65.

[5] J. Holmes, *The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy* (London: A. Bettesworth, 1739), p. 21; the scheme is more fully fleshed out in J. Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant in English Composition* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1801), p. xxii and *passim*. For further discussion, see Karshan's chapter ('The essay and the theme') above. Some scholars have asserted a link between this scheme and the later 'five-paragraph essay'; e.g., M. Nunes, 'The five-paragraph essay: its evaluation and roots in theme writing', *Rhetoric Review*, 32:3 (2013), 295–313.

Buchanan's *The Complete English Scholar* (1753), Ann Fisher's *The Pleasing Instructor* (1756), and Arthur Masson's *A Collection of Prose and Verse* (1765).[6] The English Dissenting academies taught Montaigne alongside John Locke, Algernon Sidney, Joseph Priestley, and Addison, among others. According to the influential Dissenting pedagogue Philip Doddridge, students at Kibworth Academy crafted orations on Bacon's essays and read widely in *The Spectator* and *Tatler*, although he gives no account of what topics students were asked to tackle.[7] Later eighteenth-century Dissenting instructors, like John Aikin, Andrew Kippis, and Thomas Percival, were often vigorous essayists themselves. The Hackney and Daventry academies were exceptional in expecting students to model their essays on *The Spectator* and to develop belletristic writing skills oriented to poetry and questions of taste, along with the customarily civic and political focus of Dissenting traditions.[8] The essay-writing career of Kippis's student William Hazlitt shows the salutary effect of both belletristic and civic legacies, especially in essays like 'My First Acquaintance with Poets' (1823) and 'What is the People?' (1818).

In nineteenth-century schools, however, pedagogues began advising teachers and students against trying to emulate Addison, Samuel Johnson, Hazlitt, or Thomas De Quincey. Walker's *Teacher's Assistant* cautioned that 'the elegant style of Mr Addison [is] too delicate to meet [students'] apprehension', since one 'cannot carry away . . . a single idea' from the *Spectator* essays.[9] In their place, Walker taught his own essays, claiming that students needed 'a regular chain of thinking, and a coarser and more palpable choice of words', which they apparently could not get from any of the classic or modern models.[10] Rather than teaching the 'great tradition' of eighteenth-century periodical essay writing, the schoolmaster was redirecting students to study his own reduced examples of the essay art, anticipating the trajectory towards a more managerial model of essay writing that would emerge in the late nineteenth century.[11]

[6] I. Michael, *The Teaching of English: From the Sixteenth Century to 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 172–6.

[7] I. Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), p. 78; P. Doddridge to the Rev. C. Saunders, November 1828, in J.D. Humphrys (ed.), *The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge*, 5 vols. (London: H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1829), vol. 2, pp. 463–5.

[8] T. Miller, *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), pp. 109–11.

[9] Walker, *The Teacher's Assistant*, p. xii.

[10] Ibid., p. xvi.

[11] On the great tradition of the long-eighteenth-century essay, see D. Gigante (ed.), *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Likewise, the essay's new academic prominence was increasingly measured by its distance from the oratory, reading, and translation skills, commonplace collecting, and resources of invention that had defined classical rhetoric. It was particularly the loss of *inventio* that opened a crevasse between 'language' and 'thought', putting in doubt the academic essay's ability to encompass the two. How, many wondered, could students write essays of significance if they had little or no means to generate ideas? As a set of instructions for finding arguments, *inventio* had entailed the processes of definition, comparison, and noting similarity and difference, contraries, antecedents, consequents, contradiction, cause, and effect.[12] These devices were contextually useful for rhetors or writers facing particular audiences and particular occasions; according to Quintilian, they were 'the secret places where arguments reside, and from which they must be drawn forth'.[13] They did not provide the matter of an oration (or essay) but the means of moulding content into argument. The reduction of 'invention' by the early 1800s was of a piece with the loss of cultural memory that occurred when commonplace books were no longer valued as sourcebooks for essay writing.[14]

As the most fundamental break between classical and modern rhetoric, the demoting of 'invention' from the central resource to a minor feature of composition was most influentially led by the work of Scottish Enlightenment rhetoricians Adam Smith, George Campbell, Hugh Blair, and Thomas Reid. In Blair's and Smith's lectures on rhetoric and belles-lettres, rhetorical style took precedence over invention, though historians of rhetoric have debated the extent to which it did so.[15] In later nineteenth-century teaching like Alexander Bain's, the loss of invention meant that writers in schools would be increasingly left to their own devices. Thus transformed, 'invention' became identified with the inner workings of a writer's own mind, no longer a shared fund of rhetorical devices that any writer could adapt.[16]

[12] S. Crowley, *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 3.

[13] Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, ed. H.E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), vol. 2, p. 213.

[14] On the formative role of commonplaces in Montaigne and other prose writers, see S. Black, *Of Essays and Reading in Early Modern Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), and A. Vine's chapter in this volume ('Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay').

[15] V. Bevilacqua, 'Adam Smith's lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 3:1 (1965–6), 41–60.

[16] Sharon Crowley has made the fullest case for the Scottish professors' tendency to abandon invention in favour of introspection as a source of writerly perspective, in her *The Methodical Memory*.

It is a little harder to account for *why* invention was so widely dismissed or sidelined. Recent scholarship has pointed to three likely conditions for its decline: (1) as students no longer shared a classical education with texts in the original languages, their writing could not as readily refer to a common set of topics;[17] (2) the rise of public examinations in the mid-nineteenth century required the rapid retention and reproduction of information rather than sophisticated rhetorical strategies of argument; and (3) the specialisation of disciplines underway after 1850 put the essay at the service of 'the rise of the ideal of original research in the whole university'.[18] Unable to follow either its classical precursors or modern public literary forms of the genre, the academic essay entered the nineteenth century as what the Victorian schoolmaster J.H. Fowler would later call a 'vexed' genre in search of an educational mission.[19]

The Essay in the Scottish Lecture System

As eighteenth-century Scottish rhetoricians reshaped the coming protocols of writing instruction in profound ways, their star descendants, especially George Jardine and Alexander Bain, articulated the new rhetoric very differently when it came to the essay. Having studied logic and rhetoric with Adam Smith at the University of Glasgow, Jardine became professor of logic there in 1787, and over a forty-year career made the essay a cornerstone genre of academic training. Unlike Holmes and Walker, Jardine did not retain even a vestigial version of the Ciceronian seven-part composition scheme or any explicit appeal to study the classical theory of rhetoric. His increasingly popular courses produced students like the future *Edinburgh Review* editor Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850) and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* editors John Wilson (1785–1854), who became professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, and John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854), the authoritative biographer of Walter Scott. Jardine's teaching legacy thus embraced the antithetical poles of Scottish liberalism and conservatism in the early nineteenth century.[20]

[17] A.R. Kitzhaber, *Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850–1900* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), pp. 51–2.

[18] D.R. Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*, 2nd ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. 340–1, 25 n.

[19] J.H. Fowler, *A Manual of Essay-Writing* (London: A. & C. Black, 1899), p. viii.

[20] See I. Duncan, 'Edinburgh, capital of the nineteenth century' in J. Chandler and K. Gilmartin (eds.), *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 45–64.

Against the restricted scope of classics instruction at Oxford and Cambridge, Jardine aimed to bring the whole eighteenth century into the classroom: 'the plan of education by means of books, conversation, and abridgements'.[21] His teaching was clearly popular, his class sizes rising from an average of fifty students in his early career to over two hundred after 1800.[22] Francis Jeffrey testified to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Universities of Scotland and England in 1826 that Jardine's methods promised to 'liberalise and make intelligent the mass of our population'.[23]

Jardine's programme for the essay as an intellectually ambitious teaching method was published in his *Outlines of Philosophical Education* (1818), a work that refocused the Scottish case for a new rhetoric by defending but also challenging the philosophical lecture system upon which it had been based. In the lecturing system, Jardine argued pointedly, the student's intellectual activity is far more aroused 'than when perusing a printed volume' and reporting back to his tutor at Oxford or Cambridge. On the social occasion of the lecture,

> emulation and energy are found to result from the simple circumstance, that a number of young persons similarly situated as to age and advantages, are engaged in listening to the same things, and in receiving the same impressions. A sympathetic animation pervades the whole; the glow of zeal, and an expression of curiosity are perceived in almost every countenance; all the faculties of the mind are exerted, and powers unused before, are awakened into life and activity.[24]

Yet Jardine also believed the lecture system was producing a kind of passive student who was 'constantly occupied with the mechanical operation of transferring the words of the lecture to his note-book', not his memory or intellect. The solution to this passivity was to require that students process what they were learning by writing essays: 'The improvement of the Students in philosophy, taste, and composition would be promoted at once, and by the same means . . . the young men, taught in this way, would acquire a force, and ready use, of all their intellectual faculties.'[25] Jardine's writing-to-

[21] G. Jardine, *Outlines of Philosophical Education, Illustrated by the Method of Teaching Logic . . . in the University of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Anderson & Macdowall, et al., 1818), p. 469.

[22] C. Channell, 'Genesis and analysis: the role of the essay in nineteenth-century Scottish universities', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 13:3–4 (1983), 197. For an overview of Jardine's career, see L.L. Gaillet, 'George Jardine: champion of the Scottish philosophy of democratic intellect', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 28:2 (1998), 37–53.

[23] F. Jeffrey quoted in G.E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), p. 27.

[24] Jardine, *Outlines of Philosophical Education*, pp. 464, 278.

[25] Ibid., pp. 464, 467.

learn theories prescribed that compositions be scaffolded in four parts, beginning with a basic rendering of what the students were learning, and moving by revision through three further stages towards an achieved state, thereby producing ambitious 'essays' with original arguments.[26] Thus Jardine presented a robust programme for essay writing as a self-activating education.

The issues his methods raised would come to a head with the Royal Commission inquiry headed by English aristocrats who were pushing Scottish universities to convert from their lecturing and essay system to the more highly specialised tutorial system of Oxbridge. At the Royal Commission's 1837 meeting, the Scottish classicists friendly to Oxford's curriculum attacked Jardine's approach: 'Essays of a prodigious length are given in Logic, and [students] are not able to give sufficient attention to the cultivation of taste according to the pure models and critical principles of Greece.'[27] J.C. Shairp, professor of classics at the University of St Andrews, linked the essay to the inveterately philosophical curricula at Glasgow and Edinburgh that he despised: 'Out of ordinary youth in this immature state, the result of philosophical study is and must be, a mental crop of mere words, or wordy theories spun out of half-understood abstractions, and essays of the windiest rhetoric based upon nothing.'[28] Classicists like Shairp favoured restricting the essay to examination responses or prize competitions, as was the practice at Oxford's Oriel College, against 'philosophical' ambitions like Jardine's that made essay writing a fundamental part of the learning process.[29]

Writing to the Exam

While the Royal Commission's efforts to recast Scottish universities as English made little headway until near the end of the nineteenth century, calls for the reform of Oxford and Cambridge universities amplified the demand to open opportunities to the 'best men', who were identified according to their success in the new public examinations. This opening of

[26] See Winifred Horner's discussion of Jardine's procedure in 'Rhetoric in the liberal arts: nineteenth-century Scottish universities' in J.J. Murphy (ed.), *The Rhetorical Tradition and Modern Writing* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1982), pp. 87–94.

[27] Sir Daniel Sandford, quoted in Davie, *Democratic Intellect*, p. 28.

[28] J.C. Shairp, *The Wants of the Scottish Universities and Some of the Remedies* (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1856), p. 16.

[29] On essays and examinations at Oriel, see K.C. Turpin, 'The ascendency of Oriel' in M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. 6: *Nineteenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 184.

England's two leading universities to meritocracy roiled opponents at both universities, yet the new system fell steadfastly into place by the late 1850s. University entrance and degree examinations would coincide with the parliamentary founding in 1853 of the Indian Civil Service examination, initially supervised by Thomas Babington Macaulay, whose own essays stood next to Bacon's as models for students.[30]

Both university and civil service examinations made a strong impact on the teaching of essays in Britain. Pedagogy across the universities was reshaped to meet their demands, and dozens if not hundreds of new 'cram' manuals on how to write successful essays for the exams were rushed into print from 1860 to the turn of the twentieth century. Among the cram-book writers, Robert Demaus claimed that the public examination system was transforming the scope of a 'liberal education' hitherto limited to Oxbridge's teaching of classics and mathematics. Now, young men would need to learn English grammar and the corresponding 'literature of their own country'. Hence the new examination regime 'for the first time asserted the right of the English language to rank on a par with other, *traditional*, branches of a liberal education'.[31] As we will see, controversy about the essay at this level would soon inform the more prominent debate on 'liberal education' between classicists like Matthew Arnold and utilitarians like Alexander Bain.

The content of essays for such examinations would be prone to change as well. Rather than the customary moral or historical rubrics for themes, essay topics now turned sharply towards political and economic matters concerning the benefits of empire. An 1864 Cambridge topic asked students to 'Write an essay on the advantages of an Atlantic Telegraph between England and America'; among the 1859 Oxford Local Examination rubrics were:

5. Write a short essay on Music, Painting, or Architecture.
6. Write a short essay on the recent mutinies in India.
7. Write a short essay on the advantages that a nation derives from foreign commerce.
8. Write a brief sketch of the life and character of Julius Caesar, or Queen Elizabeth, or Sir Robert Peel.[32]

[30] J. Roach, *Public Examinations in England, 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 20–4.

[31] R. Demaus, *English Literature and Composition: A Guide to Candidates in those Departments in the Indian Civil Service, with Examination Papers and Specimens of Answers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1866), pp. v–vii.

[32] Cited in J.H. Hawley, *A Complete Course in English Composition: Oxford and Cambridge Examination Papers* (London: Charles Bean, 1868), pp. 268–9.

There was little room to dissent from the assumptions underlying these topics; applauding the Indian mutinies was unlikely to enhance a prospective career in the civil service. By the time Arthur W. Ready published his cram manual *Essays and Essay Writing for Public Examinations* in 1900, it was difficult to find any essay topic that was not designed to speak to immediate national aims: 'Peace as Victory', 'Travelling Today and 70 Years Ago', 'Military Music'. Ready advised examination-takers to stockpile information rather than collect commonplaces, by way of primers like *Through the British Empire in Ten Minutes* by Colonel Sir Howard Vincent, C.B.[33]

The new system began to alter the schools' understanding of their impact on students. Public examinations were the means of transforming pupils into professionals, the Oxford reformer Mark Pattison claimed forcefully, but not into liberally educated adults. The quality of student writing declined as congeries of facts displaced lucid reflections and arguments. Essays were often found to be poorly organised, and some examiners suspected that students were preparing and memorising essays before the examination. 'I had whole essays apparently ready made', complained one test proctor, 'and on other subjects elaborate fragments, entirely off the point, were sometimes introduced as so much good material which should not get lost.'[34] From Pattison to the Scots professors of rhetoric, the 'tyranny of the examination system' was increasingly denounced as undermining the meaning of education: 'All the aspirations of a liberal curiosity, all disinterested desire for self-improvement is crushed before the one sentiment which now animates the honour-student, to stand high in the class-list.'[35]

Worse for Scotland, the examinations focused attention on the shortcomings of the Scottish ethos of general education. 'The Indian Civil Service was thrown open to competition', commented James Lorimer in *The Edinburgh Review*, 'and at the very first trial, those candidates who had been educated in Scotland failed egregiously.'[36] Some Scots professors attributed the failure to a loading of the deck: their students did their poorest work on the Greek prose and algebra examinations geared towards Oxford and Cambridge specialisations.[37] The advantages of class and breeding, said one, exemplified

[33] A.W. Ready, *Essays and Essay Writing for Public Examinations* (London: G. Bell, 1900), pp. 266–70, 16.
[34] Quoted in Roach, *Public Examinations*, p. 265.
[35] M. Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation, with Special Reference to Oxford* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1868), p. 244.
[36] J. Lorimer, 'Scottish university reform', *Edinburgh Review*, 107:217 (January 1858), 90.
[37] Davie, *Democratic Intellect*, p. 43.

why 'the English Universities have in their favour the commanding *prestige* of fashion and the still more potent influence of gold'.[38]

The rise of public examinations in the mid-nineteenth century also spurred a regrouping of classicists seeking to establish a beachhead against university reform without quite refusing it. In 1868, Frederic W. Farrar gathered a group of Cambridge fellows to produce *Essays on a Liberal Education*, using the essay form to pose questions to the new prominence of the essay as a means of examination. Civil service examinations lead to 'a vulgarising of the student's mind', wrote the classical historian Sir John Seeley of King's College, London. They undercut the dignity of a university education, he added, by stimulating 'the spirit of competition'.[39] William Johnson, looking back on a decade of public-examination practice, held that 'the fruit of essay writing has been shallow and tasteless fluency'.[40] 'I have challenged the friends of modern philosophy to devise for schoolmasters an adaptation of the classical method, plainly averring that we cannot be content with an offhand exhortation to English essay writing', he continued.[41] Between the fading classicist paradigm and what he saw as a vapid essayism among the Scots professors, Johnson gave the back-to-classics argument a novel twist: rather than study and translate the Greek and Roman exemplars, Britons should have students study and translate French, the most cultured of modern languages and literatures. With French translation rather than classical philology or modern English essay writing, 'there is no textual criticism or conjectural emendation, the worship of aberrant phrases, no love of difficulty for its own sake; there is no film of imperfect sympathy to come between the writer and the reader'.[42] A tutor at Eton, Johnson was echoing Arnold's argument in *Essays in Criticism* (1865) that the model of a centred national culture was to be French, the language in which it was impossible to write as a 'provincial', a universal language of the intellect that utilitarian England, let alone Scotland, could rarely approximate.[43]

[38] J.S. Blackie, quoted in Davie, *Democratic Intellect*, p. 45 (emphasis in original).
[39] Sir J. Seeley, 'Liberal education in universities' in F.W. Farrar (ed.), *Essays on a Liberal Education* (London: Macmillan, 1867), p. 163.
[40] W. Johnson, 'On the education of the reasoning faculties' in Farrar (ed.), *Essays on a Liberal Education*, p. 356.
[41] Ibid., p. 357. [42] Ibid., p. 363.
[43] M. Arnold, 'The literary influence of academies' in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1865), p. 63.

The Managerial Model of Essay Writing

One important, long-term consequence of the public examinations was to detach the essay from its earlier educational matrix of oratory, lecturing, and commonplacing, so that it became a practice and objective all to itself. Those closest to the examining process were the first to see this happen. Among them was Alexander Bain, appointed in 1858 as an Indian Civil Service examiner in moral science, and in 1860 as professor of logic and English literature at the University of Aberdeen. Probably no one in the nineteenth century had more impact on how academic essays were written over the following century than did Bain. Like Jardine, he was often teaching first-generation students without the polish or background of the University of Edinburgh's constituency, and he owed similar debts to the Scottish Enlightenment rhetoricians. He also levied the intellectual armoury of a utilitarianism heavily indebted to James and John Stuart Mill, George Lewes, and Harriet Martineau.[44] The holistic Jardine approach, which had made the essay central to the learning process, gave way to the analytic, quasi-positivist method advocated by Bain, which marginalised the essay in the teaching of English.

Bain stands out in part because, from his earliest work, he vigorously opposed the writing of essays, taking aim at the model bequeathed by Jardine, whose pupils, he remarked, 'were kept incessantly at work in Composition'.[45] Bain called essays 'crude devices of the infancy of the education art'.[46] Instead of essays, Bain staked his pedagogy on other types of prose, or 'modes' of discourse he defined as 'Descriptive, Narrative, Expository, Persuasive'.[47] These categories overshadowed the essay as a genre without entirely eclipsing it. In the United States, John Genung developed and spread Bain's approach in the most widely influential handbook among American educators, *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (1885).

Bain developed this argument in favour of modes and against the genre of essays through several editions of *English Composition and Grammar* (1866) and, finally, in *On Teaching English* (1887). By that time the effect of the public civil service examinations on essay teaching could be felt unmistakably, and

[44] For an account of J.S. Mill's role in the development of the political essay, see B. Schultz's discussion in 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian essay' in this volume (Ch. 27).
[45] A. Bain, *On Teaching English* (London: Longmans, Green, 1887), p. 24.
[46] Ibid., pp. 23–4.
[47] Ibid., p. 29. See R.J. Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), pp. 222–4, for a crisp account of Bain's modal system.

Bain's own experience administering the exams made him intensely dislike their effects on student work. Only 'when education is finished, and the struggle of professional life is to commence', he proposed, could the essay be justified for the Cambridge and Oxford exams.[48] Even by 1882, twenty-five years after the institution of the exams, the India Civil Service paper demanded that students model their essays after Bacon's. Bain huffed at the result: 'The pupil must go up prepared to give a scrappy answer to a scrappy question – on Atheism, on Seditions and Troubles, on Wisdom for a Man's Self, and so on.'[49]

This was a 'tyranny of examinations' that could only produce empty, essentially contentless essays, Bain held, while it chained both teachers and students to the reductive aim of writing to the test. In making this charge, he was summing up long-voiced complaints that essay instruction was increasingly frustrated by the problem of students' inability to work up good arguments. But the essays prescribed by the examination system were also shamelessly ideological: we need, he argued, to 'exclude from English teaching ... all occasion for calling forth patriotic and moral sentiment'.[50] Guiding the student 'to find the matter to be expressed' would baffle the teacher of writing until he learned to dispense with the essay genre altogether and focus instead on expository, argumentative, and narrative kinds of discourse.

While his suspicion of the essay's vacuousness in the British system may have been well founded, Bain also widened the century-old problem of the rift between form and content to the point of impassibility. By assigning the content of writing (and hence the essay itself) to other disciplines, Bain believed he was resetting the mission of the English discipline. The teacher 'may read with his pupils Burke on the French Revolution, but he should not trouble them with the political thoughts, but only with the conduct and method of the exposition – with the sentences, the paragraphs, the illustrations, the figures'.[51] Thus the academic division of labour would set the English teacher against those of 'History, Geography, Science, and so on' where there was indeed 'matter to be expressed'.[52] 'The teacher can give no preparation for essay themes', Bain added – hence the division between 'English Composition' (a study of formal elements) and the 'other [disciplines] for knowledge studies', style in the one, content in the other.[53] This

[48] Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 24. [49] Ibid., p. 41.
[50] A. Bain, *Education as a Science* (London: Longmans, Green, 1878), p. 358.
[51] Ibid., p. 357. [52] Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 26. [53] Ibid., p. 27.

was hardly what is now called 'writing across the disciplines', but it was an early if unsatisfactory articulation of such an approach to university writing.

Bain is now credited, correctly or not, with initiating the 'current-traditional rhetoric' that would dominate the teaching of writing from the later nineteenth to the late twentieth century (and which arguably still prevails in many quarters). A lynchpin of this method was to discard the essay while focusing on its molecular forms, the paragraph and the sentence. 'Look to the Paragraphs', he advised, 'and the Discourse will look to itself.'[54] His analytical approach substituted the paragraph for the essay as the focal point of a pedagogy that sought a radical simplifying of purpose: 'That great principle of teaching that the Essay system violates – the principle of concentrating attention upon a single purpose, which purpose may be followed out methodically and definitely, without being trammelled with any extraneous pursuit.'[55] As a microcosm of the essay, the paragraph could exemplify the aim of treating a single topic at a time. The topic sentence received its decisive formulation in Bain's work, to be repeated countless times over the next century in favour of the 'thesis/support' model: one idea and a corresponding set of evidence.[56] The argument of the essay thus became the sum of its topic sentences, and any other kind of complexity became a distraction from this march of mini-theses. Below the paragraph level, the sentence recapitulated the thesis-evidence sequence in its structure of subject-verb-object(s). Paramount was the principle of doing 'one definite thing at a time', paragraph by paragraph.[57] Yet the paradox was that by subordinating the essay's paragraphs to a thesis-support hierarchy, Bain's approach did not allow for the possibility that the writer could take up things 'one at a time' through a more open-ended paratactic movement of association of ideas or figures. Negating that possibility of exploring ideas, the hypotactic model of the essay tamped down the writer's own voice as well.

By largely depersonalising essay writing, contemporary-traditional rhetoric, according to many of its critics, has displaced the voices of writers with

[54] A. Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric* (London: Longmans, Green, 1866), p. 151. Richard Young and others began to challenge 'current-traditional rhetoric' in the 1970s for its Bain-influenced treatment of the essay as a product rather than a process of composing. See R. Young, 'Paradigms and problems: needed research in rhetorical invention' in C. Coover (ed.), *Research on Composing* (New York: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978), pp. 29–47.

[55] Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 27.

[56] For a critique of the thesis/support model (though it does not refer to Bain himself), see P. Heilker, *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form* (Carbondale, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996).

[57] Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 25.

the voice of the institution.[58] Its fetishising of correctness and usage as against the interpretation of meaning earned it the rebuke of I.A. Richards in 1936: 'The Usage Doctrine . . . takes the sense of an author's words to be things we know before we read him, fixed factors with which he has to build up the meanings of his sentences as a mosaic is put together of discrete independent tesserae.'[59] By offloading the teaching of 'content' to other disciplines, moreover, Bain's model also encouraged the idea of a skills transfer that somehow happens when grammatical and paragraph writing skills are assumed to be conveyable to writing complex materials in a range of disciplines. Abjuring the essay, or diminishing its complexity to an abstract shell of homologous paragraphs, had left student writing without awareness of the rich panoply of topics, commonplaces, and interaction with orality that made up classical invention as resources for composing.

A Return to the Literary Essay

The managerial model of the essay that Bain and others associated with the social sciences met with local but telling resistance at the turn of the twentieth century, prefiguring later efforts to restore the literary essay to prominence in the writing curriculum.[60] Trained at Harvard, where Bain's model prevailed, Frank Aydelotte won a term as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford from 1905 to 1907, and returned to his teaching post at Indiana University bristling with Oxonian arguments against the managerial model of university writing. His books *College English* (1913) and *The Oxford Stamp and Other Essays* (1917) outlined the teaching of English as closely aligned with a classics-informed literary education. Aydelotte devised an essay-writing approach based on models from five Victorian authors – Arnold, John Henry Newman, Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Huxley, and John Ruskin – with Huxley allowed into the humanist camp because his essays on science read as literary.[61] Aydelotte bolstered the case for teaching from literary essays by taking aim at Bain, whom he credited with influentially ratifying an anti-

[58] Crowley, *Methodical Memory*, p. 14.
[59] I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 55.
[60] For a more multicultural effort to return the essay to prominence in the teaching of writing than the classicist and Arnoldian advocacy for the literary essay around 1900, discussed here, see N. Wallack, *Crafting Presence: The American Essay and the Future of Writing Studies* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017).
[61] F. Aydelotte, 'An experiment with the freshman course' in *The Oxford Stamp and Other Essays: Articles from the Educational Creed of an American Oxonian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 185, 100–1.

intellectual 'divorce of writing from thinking': 'He would deal with no ideas in the rhetoric class except those proceeding from the rhetoric teacher and the text book.' British essays produced under this system would be 'thin, lacking in grip on human problems, in a very real sense of the word unliterary'.[62]

Behind Bain, Aydelotte detected the Scottish rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Smith 'with its eighteenth-century standards of correctness in form and its eighteenth-century tendency to minimise the importance of the idea'.[63] This indictment of rhetoric did not reopen the door to the study of literary forms, however, since Aydelotte rejected any emphasis on literary history, the evolution of literary genres, or a focus on technique. His rationale for studying literature was rather closer to the New Humanist credo of Irving Babbitt, as Aydelotte vowed to produce in students 'the careful expression of right thought', a phrase he adopted from Ruskin's dogmatic notion of 'right reason'. His methods linked essay writing to a confluence of art and religion guided by Britain's liberal culture debate between classicists and utilitarian modernisers, in which all of his assigned authors had been central.[64]

Aydelotte's model spread to Columbia, Wisconsin, and other universities by 1915, and was acclaimed by Norman Foerster, an advocate of Babbitt's work.[65] It asserted a new and ultimately unproductive division between rhetorical studies and literary studies, reassigning the essay to the latter. If the Victorian essays on liberal education by Arnold, Huxley, or Johnson figured to Aydelotte as the highest form of the essay, this overestimation may indicate how much the pedagogical revival of the essay, in the early twentieth century, asserted its literary inheritance in defiance of the eighteenth century, where there was no such division between rhetoric and content. Among his charges was that Bain had driven rhetoric into the arms of the social sciences, while his own aim was to restore the essay to literature, defined as a matter of ideas rather than forms. This readiness to divorce rhetoric from the literary may also be why his polemic is so rarely registered by modern histories of rhetoric.

Synthesising Newman and Arnold, Aydelotte's high-idealist conception of the essay in its relation to knowledge was matched by his professional career, which found a minority path through higher education, but a prestigious

[62] Aydelotte, 'The history of English as a college subject in the United States' in *The Oxford Stamp*, p. 197.
[63] Ibid., pp. 188, 190. [64] Ibid., p. 194.
[65] J. Brereton, *The Origins of Composition Study in American Universities, 1875–1925: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), p. 17.

one. By 1921, he was named president of Swarthmore College, where he put his English-major theories into practice. In 1940, he became director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where he attracted Albert Einstein and John von Neumann to matriculate as scholars in residence. Aydelotte's English pedagogy underlined American college honours courses for decades, and his chairmanship of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation's Committee of Selection, from 1925 to 1950, gave him unprecedented power to shape scholarly and artistic careers.

In Aydelotte's work we can thus find a recursive loop from the Bain-influenced writing courses that he first taught at Harvard, to the Oxford classicist model that Bain and others had renounced, then back to a liberal-culture critique of a Bain-shaped 'contemporary-traditional rhetoric' in early twentieth-century American schools. Essay writing may or may not be the dialectical discourse claimed for it by Walter Pater (though the idea, as Theodor Adorno developed it and Oscar Wilde modelled it, is deeply persuasive).[66] But its travel through the British and American academies was surely a dialectical process – first describing, then comparing, and finally reversing the premises and practices of essays in the schools.

[66] See W. Pater's remarks on dialogue and the essay in *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 176–7; O. Wilde, 'The critic as artist' in R. Ellman (ed.), *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 341–407; and T. Adorno, 'The essay as form' in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, trans. S.W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 3–23.

22

The Essay and the Rise of University English

ALEXANDRA LAWRIE

David Masson and George Saintsbury, two of the nineteenth century's most accomplished essayists and critics, were key figures in the early teaching of English literature within British universities. This chapter considers their role, and that of the essay more generally, in the development of English literature as a discipline. It considers the inclusion of essayists, particularly eighteenth-century periodical writers, on university syllabuses during the nineteenth century, and looks at how their presence on the curriculum helped to boost the scholarly credentials of English literature as a subject of academic study. It also explores how long-form essays, and the periodicals that published them, became an important battleground in the fin-de-siècle dispute over the rise of English as an academic discipline.

The dispute arose when Oxford and Cambridge refused to accord English literature degree-level status. The stubbornness of these two leading universities drew the ire of John Churton Collins, a lecturer for the University Extension Movement (a late Victorian organisation offering extramural courses to adult learners), who was exasperated at the continued sidelining of the subject to which he had devoted his career. He argued the case for university accreditation in the study of English literature in a series of combative essays published in *The Quarterly Review*, *The Nineteenth Century*, and *The Contemporary Review*, sparking a debate about new professional values and exposing tensions between scholarly essayists outside the university and establishment academics whose approach to literary texts tended, ironically, to be less rigorous and systematic – in other words, more 'essayistic'. In the end that debate reached something of an uneasy compromise, as this chapter will explore.

The Essay in University Curricula

By the mid-nineteenth century, English literature was being taught at universities around the United Kingdom, in many cases by prominent essayists

and reviewers such as David Masson and Henry Morley, successive professors of English at University College, London. The blurring of two worlds – literary journalism and academia – was common at the time, with professors of English continuing to publish while teaching.[1] Christopher Kent describes how 'by the 1870s higher journalism thronged with dons',[2] and this crossover was already apparent in the case of Masson, who was appointed the first editor of the new *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1859 while he was a professor at University College; he also found time to write essays for *The Athenaeum* and *The British Quarterly Review*, among other publications.

Masson's essays were signal examples of Victorian historicism, typically examining writers as products of their social environment. His essay 'Wordsworth', written for *The North British Review* after the poet's death in 1850, described how William Wordsworth's life coincided with the end of a long period of 'cleverness, conceit, and poverty', when 'Humanity assumed a higher mood; a deep agitation, as if from a fresh electric discharge out of celestial space into the solid body of our planet, shook the soul of the world and left it troubled and excited'.[3] The essay then turned to analyse Wordsworth's 'contemplative tendency' and 'general vigour of intellect', as well as 'the exquisite propriety and delicacy of his style; his easy and perfect mastery over the element of language'.[4] But his was a nuanced examination of Wordsworth rather than a celebratory piece, and Masson counterbalanced his praise with a discussion of some of the defects that kept Wordsworth out of 'the very highest rank' of English poets, which he limited to Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare.[5]

Masson's astute, measured essays secured his reputation as one of the most respected critics of the day. Although his multi-volume *Life of John Milton* (1859–94) is considered his lasting achievement, he wrote essays on a number of literary topics, including British novelists, Romantic poets, and Thomas De Quincey, later going on to edit the fourteen-volume *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey* (1889–90). His essays and editorial work contributed to his professorial appointment in London and kept his reputation buoyant throughout his time there and at Edinburgh, which he returned to in 1865 as Regius Professor of rhetoric and English literature. He held that position for three

[1] For an extension of this idea, see P. Marks's 'The essay and the public intellectual' in this volume (Ch. 43).

[2] C. Kent, Introduction to *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837–1913*, ed. A. Sullivan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. xx.

[3] D. Masson, 'Wordsworth' in *Essays Biographical and Critical: Chiefly on English Poets* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Co., 1856), pp. 350, 355. The essay was originally published under the title 'The poetical works of William Wordsworth, D.C.L., Poet Laureate, &c.'

[4] Ibid., pp. 377, 381.

[5] Ibid., p. 382.

decades, before being succeeded by George Saintsbury, whose writing style was generally relaxed and genial, moving with ease across practically every genre and period of literary history. Saintsbury's dozens of books include *Dryden* (1881), *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (3 vols., 1900–4), and *A History of the French Novel* (2 vols., 1917–19). Literature professors like Saintsbury and Masson placed essayists front and centre on their university syllabuses, suggesting that they regarded writers such as Joseph Addison, William Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt as substantial figures in literary history.

Lectures on the essay were just as common as those on drama and poetry, a practice that went as far back as Hugh Blair, whose lectures were delivered at the University of Edinburgh in the 1760s. For Blair, essays by Addison and Dryden were a means of instructing students on elements of rhetoric and style.[6] Lecture no. 20, one of several focused on Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, took the first of Addison's 'Pleasures of the Imagination' essays (which had appeared as no. 411 of *The Spectator* on 21 June 1712). Blair commended him for his 'clear, precise, and simple' style, and described him as 'an author writing from the native flow of a gay and pleasing imagination'.[7] But crucially Blair also scrutinised Addison's essay at the level of word choice and sentence, at times criticising him for the 'negligences' in his expression, so that students might learn by example:

> There is a falling off here from the elegance of the former sentences. We *assent* to the truth of a proposition; but cannot so well be said *to assent to the beauty of an object*. *Acknowledge* would have expressed the sense with more propriety. The close of the sentence too is heavy and ungraceful – *the particular causes and occasions of it* – both *particular*, and *occasions*, are words quite superfluous; and the pronoun *it* is in some measure ambiguous.[8]

In these early days of English literature at universities, essayists tended to be used as pedagogical tools to improve students' vocabulary and expression, and academics such as Thomas Dale, appointed the first professor of English at London University in 1828, as well as Masson, required students to perform close readings of them.[9] Masson's senior class at London was asked

[6] See, also, J. Klancher's 'The academic essay: rhetoric and pedagogy' and T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme', both in this volume (Chs. 21 and 20, respectively). Klancher discusses Blair's position in the British essay tradition between ancient and modern rhetorics.

[7] H. Blair, 'Lecture XX' in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. L. Ferreira-Buckley and S.M. Halloran (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 220.

[8] Ibid., p. 226.

[9] For more on close reading the essay, see J. Sider Jost's 'The art of criticism: essay as citation' in this volume (Ch. 9).

to 'Expand and illustrate' a set of passages from Bacon's essay 'Of Discourse'.[10] At Edinburgh, he asked students to discuss essayists in literary-historical terms: one of the exam questions in 1868 asked students to 'State briefly what you know as to the origin and early history of newspapers and periodical literature in Britain'.[11]

Academic interest in the essay as a literary genre increased after Saintsbury's arrival at Edinburgh in 1895, when essayists came to dominate the curriculum. In the university calendar for 1896–7, just a year after Saintsbury arrived, the exam papers for the MA in English skewed heavily towards questions on essayists, and these can be grouped into three main categories. Firstly, students were asked to employ the historical approach: 'Trace the history of periodicals on the *Spectator* model from the time of Addison to the end of the Eighteenth Century. Give notes as to chief contributors'; 'Show what literary and social circumstances aided the rise of the Periodical Essay under Addison and Steele'; 'Trace the Evolution of the "Letter" Essay from Howell to Goldsmith, and consider the foreign influences affecting its movement.'[12] Secondly, they were asked to compare essayists from the same period, presumably by evaluating their strengths and weaknesses: 'Write studies of Thackeray and Arnold as Essayists, from the point of view of the contention, *Le style, c'est l'homme même*'; 'Write a comparison between Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt as essayists'; 'Write a comparison between the methods of Bacon's *Essays* and Jonson's *Discoveries*.'[13] And thirdly, students were required to reflect on how the formal qualities of the essay had shifted over time: 'Give some account of the history and varying meaning of the term "Essay." Is it solely modern?'; 'How was the meaning of the term "Essay" varied as to its manner, range, purposes, by the work of Cowley, Temple, and Dryden?'; 'Sketch, by reference to the work of Overbury and Earle, the methods of the "Character" Essay. Trace the form in earlier and later times.'[14] These questions vary in terms of difficulty: some of them, clearly, could have been prepared for in advance, requiring only the

[10] [Walton & Maberly], *University College London Calendar, 1865–1866* (London: Walton & Maberly, 1865), p. xlvii.

[11] [Edmonston & Douglas], *Edinburgh University Calendar, 1868–1869* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1868), p. 166. This rather basic formulation (requiring the recitation of facts) was typical at the time: alongside more evaluative questions, students might be asked to list a specified number of historical or philosophical writers, or place a group of poets in chronological order.

[12] [J. Thin], *Edinburgh University Calendar, 1896–1897* (Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1896), pp. 702–3.

[13] Ibid., p. 702.

[14] Ibid., p. 703.

memorisation of certain facts, while others demanded evidence of independent thought and quite deep familiarity with the canon of essayists.

More significant is the sheer volume of questions on essayists, with almost a quarter of the questions that year (eleven) requiring at least some discussion of the genre, compared with just four questions on drama, and none at all on fiction. Saintsbury's examples were drawn from a range of periods, from Francis Bacon to eighteenth-century periodical writers, to literary essayists of the Victorian period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Saintsbury's admiration for Walter Pater, he also asked students to specify 'wherein lie the main powers of Pater's treatment', and this was followed by a question on Robert Louis Stevenson, who, like Pater, had died only a few years earlier.[15] Essays of all stripes were included on the syllabus, and the genre as a whole was seen as a serious, scholarly branch of study that could instruct students on large swathes of literary history; the exams required them to produce critical and evaluative answers about genre and style. Educational campaigner John Churton Collins also approved of their inclusion on syllabuses: in 1891, he compiled a list of the writers he would like to see taught for an English degree; these comprised almost all the essayists included in Saintsbury's exam questions, plus others such as De Quincey, Walter Savage Landor, and Charles Lamb.

The situation at Oxford was broadly similar. In 1908, the exam papers for 'The History of English Literature, 1600–1700' and 'History of English Literature After 1700' included mainstays like Samuel Johnson, Addison and Steele, Hazlitt, and Lamb. The essayists were given roughly equal billing with poetry and drama, and just one or two questions on the novel. In the 'Special Subject' papers on 'Early Eighteenth Century' and 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats' the following year, there were questions on the influence of *The Tatler*, on Leigh Hunt's importance in literary history, and on how De Quincey's work was affected by his relationship with Wordsworth and Coleridge.

At Cambridge, the English Tripos system was established in 1917 as a series of examinations leading to the BA, with the first exams taken in 1919. The Tripos was divided into two sections: (A) modern and medieval and (B) early literature and history, which was mainly philological, with required papers on Anglo-Saxon and early Norse. Candidates were permitted to combine one of the two sections with another Tripos, and the expectation

[15] Ibid., p. 702.

was that most students would replace the second, language-based section with a subject like classics or history. Meanwhile, for the final paper in section A, students had a choice: either answer questions on 'the life, literature, and thought of England from 1066 to 1350', or on 'the general history of literary criticism with special reference to English literature'.[16] Given the unpopularity of courses on medieval literature, students were far more likely to opt for the latter paper, where the list of recommended texts contained numerous essays from French, English, and classical literature beginning with Aristotle's *Poetics*, down through Pierre Corneille's *Discours sur la tragédie* (1660), John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1666), Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865, 1888), Walter Pater's *Appreciations* (1889), Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve's 'Qu'est-ce qu'un classique?' (1850), and the more recently published *Philosophy of Benedetto Croce* by H. Wildon Carr (1917). Not only was the essay, as a literary form, studied by English literature students at the university level, but essays themselves became the chosen pedagogical vehicle to test students' literary knowledge.

The Rise of English as a Discipline

Although the literary essay had been prominent on the university curriculum since the days of Hugh Blair in the mid-eighteenth century, providing material for academic discussion of style, genre, and social history, this long and distinguished history of teaching literary texts at university level was not enough to persuade Oxford and Cambridge to institute English literature as a degree until well into the twentieth century. This scepticism towards the discipline of English was in stark contrast to how the sciences and history were regarded at that time. Long before the fin de siècle, the latter were understood to be specialised disciplines requiring thorough and systematic training, and future professionals were expected to have secured university accreditation in the form of a degree before entering their field. For Oxford and Cambridge, literary criticism did not fall into the same category. They refused to offer specialist training to future critics and academics, remaining adamant that reading books and writing about them did not warrant a degree.

However, the subject was already being taught under their aegis within the University Extension Movement, established in the 1870s to provide

[16] [Cambridge University], *The Student's Handbook to the University and Colleges of Cambridge, 1918–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), pp. 404–5.

tertiary-level education to adults who were not able to attend a university.[17] John Churton Collins had spent years on the University Extension circuit delivering courses on literature to thousands of students. An Oxford graduate himself, he called on his alma mater to institutionalise the subject to which he had devoted his career. He believed that without the symbolic backing of Oxford and Cambridge, English literature would be regarded as a flimsy, second-rate subject, and the consequences of this would be far-reaching. In an 1887 essay for the journal *The Nineteenth Century*, he argued that 'English literature in the proper and obvious sense of the term is and will continue to be a subject of teaching in all parts of the kingdom; and if that teaching is not organised, and those who undertake it not educated, nothing but anarchy can be the result.'[18]

This debate about the role of universities in teaching English literature became front-page news in October 1886 after Collins persuaded *The Pall Mall Gazette* to support his campaign. Under the headline 'English Literature and the Universities', Collins attacked the universities of Oxford and Cambridge for their failure to put in place adequate arrangements for teaching English literature: 'no one pretends that Cambridge does anything worth speaking of for the serious study of our literature', his article claimed, 'while as for Oxford a Professorship of English Language and Literature was indeed only the other day richly endowed, but was immediately perverted by the study, not of literature, but of "Middle English" philology'.[19] Collins also sent out questionnaires to renowned public intellectuals (among them Pater, Arnold, T.H. Huxley, and William Morris) asking for their views on whether English literature should be taught at Oxford, alongside classics, but separately from philology. The responses, which were printed in *The Pall Mall Gazette* over the next few months, generally came out in favour of the proposal. John Addington Symonds went further than most by suggesting that 'What is wanted is some plan whereby the study of English should be combined with the study of classical literature, and become a necessary

[17] The universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London, and finally Victoria University in Manchester, each set up university extension societies to arrange courses on a range of topics for a wider public. John Churton Collins worked for the Oxford and London societies, travelling around the country delivering lectures and smaller classes to adult learners. His courses included 'The Greek tragedies', 'Shakespeare', 'Literature of the seventeenth century', and 'English poetry between 1793 and 1850'.

[18] J.C. Collins, 'Can English literature be taught?' *Nineteenth Century*, 22 (November 1887), 645.

[19] J.C. Collins, 'English literature and the universities', *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 October 1886), 1. Collins was referring to the University of Oxford's decision to appoint A.S. Napier, who was a language specialist rather than a literary scholar, to its newly established Merton Professorship of English language and literature in 1885.

element in the education of every undergraduate who aspires to honours or reads for a degree.'[20]

The Pall Mall Gazette might seem a surprising place for this issue to be raised, given that under W.T. Stead's editorship, the newspaper saw itself as appealing mainly to working-class interests. By launching his campaign there, Collins was clearly hoping to frame this as an issue of national significance, the impact of which might be felt far beyond the walls of Oxford and Cambridge. The teaching of English literature in most schools was fairly rudimentary at this stage: children would find literary excerpts in their textbooks, but these were used to teach spelling and grammar only. Collins argued that if the ancient universities offered proper training to future English teachers, this would raise educational standards across the entire country. His campaign represents an important (and very lively) stage in the 'rise of English', but his focus on the University of Oxford tends to overshadow the fact that literary texts had been taught in a scholarly and systematic manner at other institutions for many decades. As we have seen, it was taught at Scottish universities under flamboyant professors such as Masson and Saintsbury; and at English universities like University College, London by A.J. Scott and Henry Morley (as well as Masson) and Queen's College for Women in London by Charles Kingsley.

Central to the advancement of English studies was another major Victorian writer and a contemporary of Kingsley, Matthew Arnold, primarily because of an essay he had written some thirty years earlier, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', printed in the final issue of Walter Bagehot's *National Review* in November 1864, and the following year in his collection *Essays in Criticism*. The essay's rather lofty style allowed Arnold to be commandeered by pro-English literature activists like Collins, who could claim, with some justification, that Arnold's championing of 'disinterested' criticism was a plea for proper training in literary criticism in order to 'make the best ideas prevail' and, crucially, to 'make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself'.[21] Anthony Kearney, Collins's biographer, has described him as an 'intense and earnest campaigner for Arnold's ideals . . . [whose] whole career was taken up fighting what he thought of as Arnold's battles'.[22] Arnold's essay offered symbolic (rather than practical) support for the study of English literature, and when

[20] J.A. Symonds, 'English at the universities' (Part 3), *Pall Mall Gazette* (25 November 1886), 2.
[21] M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1865), p. 6.
[22] A. Kearney, *John Churton Collins: The Louse on the Locks of Literature* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), p. 152.

asked directly about teaching English literature at Oxford, he offered a 'decidedly cautious' response that seems likely to have been painful to Collins.[23] In his reply to Collins's questionnaire, which was printed in *The Pall Mall Gazette* on 7 January 1887, he claimed to support the study of English texts alongside classical literature (as Collins had proposed), but admitted to having 'no confidence in those who at the universities regulate studies, degrees, and honours', because 'To regulate these matters great experience of the world, steadiness, simplicity, breadth of view are desirable; I do not see how those who actually regulate them can well have these qualifications.' His letter concluded with the following warning: 'I fear, therefore, that while you are seeking an object altogether good – the completing of the old and great degree in arts – you may obtain something which will not only not be that but will be a positive hindrance to it.'[24]

Collins's campaign was accorded top billing by W.T. Stead, the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead's popular evening paper traded in sensationalist news stories and managed to transform a seemingly abstruse issue of university policy into front-page news. But while *The Pall Mall Gazette* broadcast Collins's message among a large readership, Collins understood that setting out his argument in more scholarly, long-form essays in the serious journals would lend his campaign some much-needed intellectual heft. Since the 1870s, he had been writing literary essays (on Shakespeare, Montaigne, Dryden, Emerson, and Browning) for *The Quarterly Review* and *Cornhill Magazine*. These were strikingly well-researched pieces of scholarship, heavy on biographical and historical detail. His essay on Dryden, which originally appeared in *The Quarterly Review* in 1878, devoted pages of description to establishing the seventeenth-century political mood. The following passage is typical:

> The mad joy of 1660 had undergone its natural reaction, and that reaction was intensified by a long series of national calamities and political blunders. There were feuds in the Cabinet and among the people; the established religion was in imminent peril; the Royal House had become a centre of perfidy and disaffection. Clarendon had been made the scapegoat of the disasters which had marked the commencement of the reign – of the miserable squabbles attendant on the Act of Indemnity, of the first Dutch War, of the sale of Dunkirk. But Clarendon was now in exile, and with him was removed of the very few honourable ministers in the service of the Stuarts.[25]

[23] Ibid.
[24] M. Arnold, 'English at the universities' (Part 9), *Pall Mall Gazette* (7 January 1887), 1–2.
[25] J.C. Collins, *Essays and Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 39.

When Collins turned his attention to Dryden's writing, he produced stretches of detailed critical evaluation about the major works and considered Dryden's influence on later poets such as Pope and Wordsworth. Any reader who had absorbed all ninety pages of Collins's essay could justifiably claim to be well informed about Dryden's plays and poems, the context in which he was writing, and his place in literary history.

Collins set great store by thorough and careful scholarship, and this rendered him naturally ill-disposed to Edmund Gosse, whose critical writing was more accessible to the general reader, but tended to be imprecise with regards to facts and literary judgments. In October 1886, *The Quarterly Review* published Collins's deliberately antagonistic essay on Gosse's *From Shakespeare to Pope*, a collection of lectures he had delivered as Clark lecturer at Cambridge. As well as literary essays, Collins wrote a number of these crusading essays that masqueraded as book reviews. Christopher Kent labels this formulation the 'review-like essay', where 'works under consideration often functioned increasingly as nominal springboards for wider discussion of related matters'.[26] Collins's 'review' of Gosse's work was a forty-page diatribe on sloppy critical standards, which he regarded as particularly egregious in this case because the book had been published by Cambridge University Press. Collins felt that the university imprint was likely to dupe ordinary readers into assuming the book's quality was assured, when in fact the scholarship was extremely poor: 'When we consider the circulation secured to this volume from the mere fact of its distinguished patronage', Collins wrote, 'it is melancholy to think of the errors to which it will give currency.'[27]

The tone in this essay tended towards the dramatic: 'No thoughtful man can contemplate the present condition of current literature without disgust and alarm', he announced near the start, before gleefully pointing out the innumerable mistakes Gosse had committed to print.[28] But Gosse was merely collateral damage. Collins's main objective was to shame Cambridge into coordinating its teaching of the subject in a proper manner by trained experts (like Collins himself, presumably). Instead, the university was inviting men like Gosse to give lectures, despite his 'utter incapacity for the task', with the book resulting from them then 'hurried into the world' by

[26] Kent, Introduction to *British Literary Magazines*, p. xviii. For more on the review essay, see R. Morrison's 'Nineteenth-century reviews reviewed' in this volume (Ch. 24).
[27] J.C. Collins, 'English literature at the universities', *Quarterly Review*, 163:326 (October 1886), 312.
[28] Ibid., 292.

the university publisher without any check on its quality.[29] The fact that very few critics had noticed Gosse's 'ignorance' and 'recklessness' when it came to literary facts and judgments was proof that the increasing numbers of graduates who moved into literary journalism needed the type of preparation that only the universities, by including literary criticism on their syllabuses, were in a position to provide.[30]

The Professional vs. Amateur Literary Critic (Often Two in One)

Collins's objective was to prove that literary criticism was a serious profession that could lay claim to what Ian Small describes as a 'specific body of knowledge' that is 'no longer the kind of knowledge which the general public may acquire', but can be obtained only through properly arranged university teaching and thorough examinations, a process that neither Gosse nor his reviewers had been through.[31] Small describes this as the 'process of professionalization', when knowledge 'becomes restricted to a specific group of practitioners' who have received specialist university training, ensuring 'a certain standard of expertise, essential in retaining public respect', as well as 'maintain[ing] the restrictions and exclusions which are necessary for a profession to keep its status and separate identity'.[32] Collins compared English literature with other subjects such as history and the sciences, which had already been introduced onto university syllabuses. This explained why 'An editor of a scientific or historical Review has not the least difficulty in finding contributors who are able to write up to the high level required in such subject', whereas 'editors of literary Reviews are constantly under the necessity of accepting articles, the inferiority of which they are themselves the first to admit'.[33]

We might usefully read Collins's various diatribes as a defence of the essay form, which he felt to be in danger of extinction. Readers of eighteenth-century periodical writing, he suggested, would have been part of an 'intellectual aristocracy'; having received a 'learned education' themselves, they expected from their essayists a 'classical style, a refined tone, and an adequate

[29] Ibid., 298, 292. [30] Ibid., 300.
[31] I. Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 24.
[32] Ibid. For more on this topic, see P. Keen's 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' in this volume (Ch. 14).
[33] Collins, 'English literature at the universities', 329.

acquaintance with the chief authors of Ancient Rome and of Modern France'.[34] That readership had now expanded and become less discerning. Particularly after the Education Act of 1870, when the number of magazines had increased exponentially to meet the demand for entertaining and informative reading matter, any writer might find an audience, regardless of his or her educational background or talent. Collins complained that 'catch [ing] the popular ear' was now a 'thriving and lucrative calling' for literary journalists, making them less inclined to aim for erudition, and rendering them ill-suited to the demands of long-form journalism.[35]

It is true that the major Victorian quarterlies such as *The Quarterly Review* and *The Edinburgh Review* had significantly waned in influence by the end of the century, while respected monthlies like *Macmillan's*, *The Cornhill*, and *The Nineteenth Century*, where the essay had also remained a dominant feature, struggled to cope with market changes. But Collins was wrong to imply that the essay itself was in decline. In 1893 Walter Pater would describe the essay as 'that characteristic literary type of our time', and along with other writers with 'aesthetic and Decadent leanings', such as J.A. Symonds, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Vernon Lee, Pater produced important essays throughout the fin de siècle, while Sidney Lee and Leslie Stephen continued to write the type of literary criticism that Collins (who disliked the aesthetic movement) favoured.[36] Collins's belief that a literature degree from Oxford or Cambridge was the only way to elevate the standards of literary criticism – and by implication secure the survival of the literary essay – proved unfounded.

When George Saintsbury took up the Regius chair at Edinburgh in 1895, he became the most prominent literature professor in the United Kingdom. The second series of his *Essays in English Literature, 1780–1860* was published the same year, and Collins seized on the opportunity to review it anonymously for *The Saturday Review*, where Saintsbury had spent a decade as an assistant editor. Collins reminded readers of Saintsbury's 'recent appointment' to the Edinburgh chair, which 'gives special interest to his new volume'; he then set him up for ridicule by noting sarcastically that, 'Here men of letters and students of English literature may fairly expect to find the qualifications that must exist to justify Professor Saintsbury's appointment,

[34] Ibid., 291. [35] Ibid.

[36] Pater quoted in S. Evangelista, 'Things said by the way: Walter Pater and the essay' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 242.

the great excellences that must have been required to outweigh the claims of such a teacher of English literature as Mr Churton Collins.'[37] Collins was by this stage a highly experienced lecturer, while Saintsbury was a journalist and reviewer with no teaching experience whatsoever; this was clearly a factor in his arch review of the new professor's essay collection, which described Saintsbury as a 'literary charlatan' who 'stands sorely in need of the teaching it is now his duty to impart'.[38]

Leaving professional envy to one side, Collins's negative assessment of Saintsbury's book was not entirely baseless, because while Saintsbury's approach to literary texts was enthusiastic, he was careless with the facts and tended to rely quite heavily on personal taste. His essay on Hazlitt, in the volume of essays reviewed by Collins, was typical of his impressionistic, circuitous style: 'The clear sunshine of Hazlitt's admirably acute intellect is always there; but it is constantly obscured by driving clouds of furious prejudice. Even as the clouds pass, the light may still be seen on distant and scattered parts of the landscape; but wherever their influence extends, there is nothing but thick darkness, gusty wind and drenching rain.'[39] Collins poured scorn on Saintsbury's meandering discussion of writers, labelling the author 'obviously ignorant' and his critical judgments 'arbitrary'.[40] Saintsbury tended to use his prefaces to defend himself pre-emptively for any 'flaws and dropped stitches', but Collins was trying to promote the study of English literature as a serious academic discipline, and insisted that Saintsbury was inadvertently undermining that campaign by fostering the sense that literary study was an amateurish pursuit – unstructured, vague, and premised on one's own likes and dislikes.[41]

In Saintsbury's famous essay 'The Kinds of Criticism', which served as the introduction to *Essays in English Literature, 1780–1860*, he wrote that 'the whole end, aim, and object of literature and the criticism of literature, as of all art, and the criticism of all art, is beauty and the enjoyment of beauty'.[42] This defence of his aesthetic approach played into the hands of detractors, not only Collins but, for example, Edward A. Freeman, professor of history at Oxford. His essay in *The Contemporary Review* in 1887 responding to

[37] J.C. Collins, 'A professor of English literature on his own subject', *Saturday Review* (30 November 1895), 725.
[38] Ibid., 726.
[39] G. Saintsbury, *Essays in English Literature, 1780–1860*, 2nd series (London: J.M. Dent, 1895), p. 138.
[40] Collins, 'A professor of English literature', 725.
[41] G. Saintsbury, *The Later Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1907), p. ix.
[42] Saintsbury, *Essays in English Literature*, p. xiv.

Collins's *Pall Mall Gazette* campaign argued that the study of literature seemed to be 'largely a matter of taste' and that the student would therefore not be judged so much on his knowledge of the facts, as on 'whether his mere taste, his mere opinion, agrees with that of the Examiner or not'.[43]

Saintsbury's subjective and rather unfocused treatment of writers marked him out as a generalist like Gosse, and in contrast to scholar-critics like Masson, Morley, and Collins who, from different positions, claimed professional status. For Collins, at issue was the fact that Saintsbury was subjecting students to a belletristic treatment of literary texts, leaving them ill-equipped to approach authors and texts with any degree of specialised knowledge. But his published essays do not accurately reflect Saintsbury's syllabus, which was ambitious but systematic, and provided students with a thorough understanding of literary history. We should thus draw a distinction between the two types of literary work (teaching and publishing), rather than assume that the idiosyncratic judgments in Saintsbury's published work were reproduced wholesale in the lecture hall. But we might also consider the value of his belletrist approach, which can be likened to that of Charles Lamb; Saintsbury was an admirer of the *Essays of Elia* (1823, 1833), describing them as 'works of genius' that display Lamb's 'fervent love for literature and a wonderful gift of expounding it; imagination in a high, and fancy almost in the highest degree'.[44] And this 'essayistic' approach to literature, carried forward by Saintsbury, remained in vogue long after the institutionalisation of literary studies.

Professor Arthur Quiller-Couch, who is credited with establishing the School of English at Cambridge, delivered enormously popular lectures that were later published as volumes of essays. In his 1916 collection, *On the Art of Writing*, he urged readers to delight in the aesthetic appreciation of literature: 'We should lay our minds open to what he [the author] wishes to tell, and if what he has to tell be noble and high and beautiful, we should surrender and let soak our minds in it.'[45] He also differentiated himself from 'professional' critics and academics ('those learned scholars'), noting that 'there is no surer sign of intellectual ill-breeding than to speak, even to feel, slightingly of any knowledge oneself does not happen to possess'.[46] While his own writing heaped praise on authors who 'teach us to lift our own souls', the work of

[43] E.A. Freeman, 'Literature and language', *Contemporary Review*, 52 (October 1887), 563.
[44] G. Saintsbury, *A History of Nineteenth-Century Literature (1780–1895)* (London: Macmillan, 1896), p. 183.
[45] A. Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* (1916; London: Guild Books, 1946), p. 14.
[46] Ibid.

other critics should not be underestimated; their 'labours' allowed readers to 'enjoy it [the work] afterwards in other ways and from other aspects'.[47] The word 'labours' is key: the impression Quiller-Couch gives throughout these essays is of an enthusiastic amateur guided by his own tastes, far removed from the industry and systematicity of his professionalised peers. He made this contrast even more explicit in 'On the Use of Masterpieces', published in *On the Art of Reading* (1920), in which he refuted the idea that studying literary texts served any functional purpose: 'the first obligation we owe to any classic, and to those whom we teach, is to treat it *absolutely*: not for any secondary or derivative purpose, or purpose recommended as useful by any manual . . . in short we should *trust* any given masterpiece for its operation, on ourselves and on others'.[48]

Ironically, as one can see, it was often establishment academics whose essays focused on a text's aesthetic qualities, while outsiders placed more emphasis on factual information about the author or period. But it would be wrong to conclude that the two styles of essay writing were ultimately irreconcilable. As well as highlighting the sheer delight that works of literature could engender, Quiller-Couch was clear that arming oneself with knowledge of an author's life and context would significantly increase that enjoyment. And Collins was susceptible to making exactly the type of declamatory statements about authors that we would associate with belletristic essayists. Dryden 'taught our literature to adapt itself to an altered world', Collins wrote towards the end of his essay: 'He struck the keynote of the new strains; he marshalled the order of the new procession.'[49] The best essays managed to balance enthusiasm with erudition, and it was above all else the flexibility of the essay form, and its accommodation to a range of voices and styles, that explains its considerable appeal to this generation of professors and educational activists.

[47] Ibid.
[48] A. Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Reading* (1920; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 200.
[49] Collins, *Essays and Studies*, p. 86.

23

Victorian Essays in Criticism

JASON CAMLOT

The Victorian essay in cultural criticism, or the 'essay in criticism' as Matthew Arnold termed it, had a distinctive purpose and discernible qualities among the numerous forms of essays published in the nineteenth century.[1] Mario Aquilina describes the essay genre as an intimate form of writing that is conversational in tone, pursued by an author who presupposes a sympathetic and collaborative reader with whom he can pursue a shared experience and exploration of a subject.[2] The Victorian essay of cultural critique, however, may sound less like a conversation than a lecture, and may presuppose an obscure (if not explicitly antipathetic) and resistant reader with whom the possibility of shared experience and genuine collaboration in the pursuit of thought must first be established through extensive illustration, assertion, and pedagogical formation of the reader's perceptions of the world around him. The Victorian critic will observe, interpret, proclaim, and teach the reader to see, at all costs, because the possibility of a sympathetic encounter that defines the essay as a genre from its origins is at stake.

If we consider Denise Gigante's introductory account in *The Great Age of the English Essay*, which examines the essay as it evolved in the eighteenth century, and speculate on what the essay had become within new structures of use and pressures of demographic and social change in the nineteenth century, we find similar preoccupations attended to with radically different motives, solutions, and results. Gigante notes the eighteenth-century essayists' concerns with character and personae, place and location, audience, and then increasingly, towards the end of the century, with the 'authenticity and

[1] M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865).

[2] M. Aquilina compiles observations on the essay form by Phillip Lopate, Graham Good, Michael L. Hall, and Sarah Levine in his 'Introduction: Thinking the essay at the limits' in Aquilina (ed.), *The Essay at the Limits: Poetics, Politics and Form* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), p. 2. Aquilina's 'The preface essay' in this volume (Ch. 29) charts an important though neglected subgenre of the essay.

originality of the speaking subject', and 'a heightened sense of consciousness about their relation to the English literary tradition and the essay form as such'.[3] My account of the Victorian essay in criticism will consider the significance of publication contexts, the critic's emphasis on specific capacities in perception as a ground for argument with an overarching pedagogical imperative, and the deep historicism of the Victorian critic's purview. Of particular interest is the extensive pressure placed on the critic as an individual observer tasked with communicating experience and ideas that suggest the possibility of a unifying and synthesising power of culture for a national population. As in all essays, the relationships between the abstract and the particular, and the general and the individual, are deeply in play. It is the specific historical stakes of these relationships that give the Victorian essay in cultural criticism its unique shapes and tones. I will tell this story with reference to some well-established examples of the genre by Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, William Morris, and Oscar Wilde.

Contexts for the Victorian Essay in Cultural Criticism

Significant historical conditions contributed to the development of the essay as a new form of cultural critique and reckoning in the Victorian period, which help explain why the essay's generic affordances were pushed to make the signs of historical change legible. The Victorian critic used the essay as a mode through which to distinguish, critique, and unify. Whether we identify the start of the period with the rise of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837, the introduction of the 'first' Reform Act of 1832, or the emergence of a new political temper as signified by the founding of instruments like the utilitarian, liberal *Westminster Review* in 1824, the Victorian era is characterised by significant political, cultural, and ideological transformation. It was a period of major demographic change. The 1851 census showed that, for the first time, more people in England were living in urban than rural situations, with 54 per cent of the population in cities. That number rose to 70 per cent by 1881.[4] No other country approached comparative conditions of urbanisation

[3] D. Gigante, Introduction to Gigante (ed.), *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. xviii–xxix.

[4] D. Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 20–34.

until the twentieth century. England was not the same place it had been during the 'great age of the English essay', and so the essay adapted to address its new historical conditions.

With such growth in urban populations, industrialisation, and a political trajectory towards increasing democratisation came a significant transformation in the production and dissemination of the printed word. Richard Altick has noted the dramatic change in scope of the publishing industry at the start of the Victorian period, painting a picture of urban publishers 'beholding for the first time a vast sea of common readers'.[5] While widespread literacy developed gradually in England,[6] the growth of the periodical press and the rise of cheaper journals aimed at 'common' readers, starting in the 1830s, signalled new possibilities, stakes, and responsibilities for the writers contributing to the increasingly diverse range of publication venues available to them.[7] The periodical press as a wide-reaching communications platform revealed a range of approaches for engaging with the complexity of industrial society and a growing urban culture. Thousands of prose works would qualify as essays, and they were published in hundreds of different periodicals, ranging from reviews to magazines, newspapers, journals, and, increasingly, niche-market-oriented periodical publications, throughout the Victorian period.[8] Many were published anonymously or under pseudonyms. A large-scale indexing project such as the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, which provides author indexing for 91,000 records (most of them essays of some form or another) for forty-five 'important' Victorian journals, demonstrates the remarkable quantity and diversity of essay materials appearing in periodicals during the period.[9]

[5] R. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900*, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), p. 274.

[6] For accounts of popular literacy in Victorian England, see J. Rose, 'Education, literacy, and the Victorian reader' in P. Brantlinger and W.B. Thesing (eds.), *The Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 31–47; L. Stone, 'Literacy and education in England, 1640–1900', *Past & Present*, 42:1 (February 1969), 118–42; and D.F. Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

[7] For more on this topic, see J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' in this volume (Ch. 25).

[8] For discussion of the specific cultural positioning taken by some of these periodicals, see J. Camlot, 'The character of the periodical press' in *Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic: Sincere Mannerisms* (2008; Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 13–25; A. Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837–1913* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984); and J. Shattock and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982).

[9] W.E. Houghton (ed.), *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1972), http://wellesley.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do (accessed 4 January 2022).

The Victorian essay arose from a particular performative or print context, often with its own historical circumstances of reading and listening or paratextual encumbrances, from which it then commonly migrated into new contexts where it signified differently. In many cases, the examples of Victorian essays in criticism we are most familiar with, and that are taught today, first appeared as reviews, prefaces, conclusions, or as subsections of chapters from multi-volume works, which were subsequently extracted and cleaned up as stand-alone pieces. These well-known essays maintain qualities that are rooted in the expectations and effects demanded by their original publication contexts. Some cases in point: 'Signs of the Times' (1829) was one of Thomas Carlyle's early review essays, written for *The Edinburgh Review*. A review essay offered an occasion to provide an account loosely responsive to the content and arguments of recent publications, usually clustered together because they were on related topics or themes.[10] The approach Carlyle takes in this piece represents the emergence of a new genre, one that transforms the more partisan review essay that would speak according to the editorial position of the journal that published it, into a higher-level, didactic form of philosophical commentary on the current state of culture. Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic' was first published in 1853 as the sixth chapter of the second volume of the three-volume work, *The Stones of Venice*. It quickly became an essayistic set piece in cultural criticism when it was printed as an introductory pamphlet for the first attendees of the Working Men's College in London in 1854, and its importance was underscored later in the century when William Morris published it (with an introduction of his own composition) as a book unto itself with his Kelmscott Press in 1892.[11] This prose piece captures some of the tone of Ruskin's lecture voice, which often informed his writing.

Matthew Arnold's criticism was also deeply shaped by his practice as a public lecturer. His 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' was first presented on 29 October 1854 as one of many lectures he delivered as professor of poetry at Oxford. The next month it was published in the prestigious quarterly *National Review*,[12] and finally it appeared as the

[10] W.V. Harris, 'Interpretive historicism: "Signs of the Times" and *Culture and Anarchy* in their contexts', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 44:4 (1990), 445. On the development of the review essay, see R. Morrison's 'Nineteenth-century reviews reviewed' in this volume (Ch. 24) and, specifically in the context of *The Edinburgh Review*, the second section of that chapter.

[11] P.D. Anthony, *John Ruskin's Labour: A Study of Ruskin's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 45.

[12] R.H. Super, 'Arnold's Oxford lectures on poetry', *Modern Language Notes*, 70:8 (1955), 582.

prefatory essay to his first series of *Essays in Criticism* in 1865.[13] Walter Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* first appeared in print as part of a review of William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* in *The Westminster Review* in October 1868. As a review, it initiated an exercise in critical appreciation that developed into an intensive enactment of the form of phenomenological observation that, when republished in 1873 as the conclusion to Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, came to define a late Victorian mode of aesthetic criticism. This selection from a periodical review had such a controversial influence as a stand-alone 'aesthetic manifesto' (as Rachel Teukolsky has called it) that Pater removed it from the second edition of the book in 1877, but then restored it in the third, revised edition of *The Renaissance* (1888).[14]

Morris himself contributed many published lectures and essays throughout the 1880s to *Commonweal*, the 'Official Journal of the Socialist League' which he edited from 1885 to 1890, though his essay, 'The Socialist Ideal: Art', was published in the liberal journal *The New Review* (1891) with the aim of bringing his lessons in socialism to a wider audience. Oscar Wilde's dialogues and essays that were published in periodicals before being collected in the book *Intentions* (1891) and his 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1891, represent innovative fin-de-siècle contributions to Victorian cultural criticism. Wilde worked extensively as a weekly reviewer, writing and publishing nearly 100 (or, as R.J. Green notes, over 550 pages of) book and theatre reviews before he wrung the form of the Victorian essay in cultural criticism to its limit in his late critical writings.[15]

Knowing publication contexts and avenues of textual migration across venues helps ground our understanding of the forms a Victorian essay might take, and of the frames that shaped its reception. Jon Klancher has noted a recognition and dramatisation of 'the discontinuity of publics'[16] emerging already in the periodical essays of the 1790s–1820s, and has proposed that the late Romantic essayists created four recognisable kinds of 'strategic'

[13] M. Arnold, 'The function of criticism at the present time' in *Essays in Criticism*, pp. 1–41.
[14] R. Teukolsky, 'Walter Pater's *Renaissance* (1873) and the British Aesthetic movement' in D.F. Felluga (ed.), *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (Fall 2012), https://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=rachel-teukolsky-walter-paters-renaissance-1873-and-the-british-aesthetic-movement (accessed 13 July 2023).
[15] R.J. Green, 'Oscar Wilde's *Intentions*: an early modernist manifesto', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 13:4 (1973), 397.
[16] J. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 44.

audiences, discernible in their modes of address: 'a newly self-conscious middle-class public, a nascent mass audience, a polemical radical readership, and the special institutional audience'.[17] While these and other possible conceptions of audience and reading public may be found in the forms of address and micro-rhetorical gestures – what Erving Goffman refers to as the speaker's 'footing' – deployed by Victorian cultural critics,[18] a more common characteristic of these writers is either to pretend they have a specific audience in mind, as if in a lecture hall with listeners in view, or, to 'speak' with a combination of equally strong certainty and uncertainty, as if addressing an audience of listeners beyond view with a precarious hope they may be present and sympathetic. The 'conversational' tone and 'desultory . . . wanderings' that Gigante identifies with the eighteenth-century periodical essay turn to a more serious, urgent, and directive pedagogical tone in the work of the Victorian cultural critic, where the particular position and perception of the essayist is infused with a sense of mission to share a disposition of thought and perception, a way of seeing.[19] To see in the same manner does not mean to see the same thing, exactly. Rather, it means to engage in a like mode of critical perception, through engagement with what David Russell has identified as expository tact, 'an art of redirection and revaluation, working within the terms it seeks to critique in order . . . to open new avenues of relation'.[20] The idea of a shared culture is enacted in the essay in criticism as a dynamic phenomenological disposition the critic aims to make common.

Ideas of Culture and Criticism

The Victorian essay in cultural criticism negotiates intersecting meanings of the idea of culture: culture as a discernible body of artistic and intellectual work of agreed value (a canon); culture as a shared set of values, practices, ways of being and doing; culture as the totality of interacting artistic, economic, social, political, and ideological elements that compose the lived experience of a society or nation, as opposed to another; culture as a long-formed capacity of thought and sensibility within an individual.[21] These four

[17] Ibid., p. 4.
[18] E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 128.
[19] Gigante, Introduction to *The Great Age of the English Essay*, p. xxi.
[20] D. Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 2.
[21] For an extended discussion of prominent definitions of culture in nineteenth-century Britain, see T. Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 1–34.

short definitions of culture are in constant play in the Victorian essay in criticism, which is distinctive for its methods of presenting universal claims based on its delivery of detailed, historically situated experience.[22] The Victorian critic explores the essay as a form through which to dissolve the tension between experience and abstract knowledge, very often by taking the stance of critical interpreter of his experiential observations with an implicit claim, on his authority, of their general significance. The cultural critic's communication of processes for right perception was framed within a historical model that came in large part from German Romanticism and that understood the present modernity as a fractured version of a once organically synthetic past.

Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1795), for example, transferred the notion of the division of labour and of factions in society from social groups and classes to the inner functioning of the individual's mind, asserting that the mind became increasingly fragmented as society grew more complex.[23] The paradigmatically historical structure of the German Romantic narrative of progress, from a simple, whole, and unified culture of the past (for Schiller, Hellenic Greece) to a fragmented, complex, and fractious culture of the present, had an enormous influence on the historicist accounts developed by Victorian critics and the solutions they proposed in essay form to remedy the cultural ills of the present. The remedy became the restoration of a sense of 'wholeness' through accounts of a shared experience of art and culture. The work of the cultural critic was to elevate a particular perception and understanding of culture over politics and all institutionally structured aspects of society by demonstrating that the complexity of the social sphere could be restructured through enculturation of the individual. Terry Eagleton describes the stakes of this process: 'To elevate culture over politics – to be men first and citizens later – means that politics must move within a deeper ethical dimension, drawing on the resources of *Bildung* and forming individuals into suitably well-tempered, responsible citizens.'[24] The essay served as an ideal form in

[22] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form (1958)', trans. B. Hullott-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 152–3.

[23] For an example of how Friedrich Schiller's narrative of aesthetic education worked by contrasting the state of political, material, mental, and sensory culture of the past to that of the present, see his comparison of the period of Greek culture, when 'the senses and the mind had still no strictly separate individualities' to 'us moderns!' who proceed 'in a fragmentary way'; F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. R. Snell (1795; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 38.

[24] Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 15.

which to dramatise the implications of this modern *Bildung*, and to attempt a transformation of the structures of perception and feeling of the reader.

The role of the cultural critic was to observe, report, and prognosticate the signs found in the complex, intersecting weave of the emerging fabric of modernity, but also to demonstrate a particular way of seeing. For example, in 'Signs of the Times', Carlyle proposed a method for looking at the 'perplexed scene where we stand', so that 'some of its distinctive characters and deeper tendencies more clearly reveal themselves'.[25] In his 'serious inspection' of the signs he saw around him, he used the metaphor of the machine to comment on a wide range of institutional formations including government, the Church and religion, social systems, the publishing industry, economic systems such as taxation and property, legal and moral institutions, as well as institutions of literature. All of these domains are characterised as mechanical, material forces that work against the dynamic, individual, spiritual realm. The cultural critic's effort allows him to reveal the transitory nature of seemingly eternal things (like laws and structures of production). 'If we look deeper', Carlyle states, 'we shall find that this faith in Mechanism has now struck its roots down into man's most intimate, primary sources of conviction.'[26] Carlyle's critical position of looking deeper, past the things surrounding him, into the signs that those things represent, is an early form of ideology critique.

Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic' is an equally powerful example of the critic's communication of a new process of looking. Ruskin sees how the formal qualities of artefacts reflect the nature of the society from which they came, and the reader sees with him. He praises the savageness, rudeness, and fallibility of Gothic architecture as a way of critiquing the architecture, culture, and society of the mid-Victorian period. The power of his critical eye as communicated in his writing lies in its ability to read and share an understanding of the 'intrinsic value' of what he sees, which he sets in opposition to its exchange value within a capitalist marketplace.[27] Ruskin's method was one of ekphrastic pedagogy in which he functioned as a kind of docent to his senses, but with a pedagogical prowess and authority that was

[25] T. Carlyle, 'Signs of the times', *Edinburgh Review*, 49 (June 1829), 441. [26] Ibid., 452.

[27] In his works on political economy, Ruskin defines the true value of a thing according to its power to support life, as opposed to the more variable and less ethical definitions of value that are made according to markets of exchange: 'To be "valuable," therefore, is to "avail towards life." A truly valuable or availing thing is that which leads to life with its whole strength. In proportion as it does not lead to life, or as its strength is broken, it is less valuable; in proportion as it leads away from life, it is unvaluable or malignant.' J. Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 209.

not subject to doubt.[28] He used techniques that allowed him to present the world from numerous angles and perspectives, so that objects and landscapes might be viewed from a wide spectrum of degrees of distance and proximity. He enacted elements of the innovative narrative techniques introduced by novelists, especially varieties of limited omniscient observation, in the expository essay.

Ruskin opens 'The Nature of Gothic' by inviting his reader to consider the difference between the landscapes of Northern and Southern Europe from the perspective of a swallow traversing the continent in the sky above in the course of its migration: 'Imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, . . . and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes.'[29] He does not simply ask us to imagine the journey from that perspective, but paints a rich sensory picture, a dynamic aesthetic experience of what that perspective would feel like. This opening bird's-eye account of European geography continues for several pages, providing the reader with an immersive example of the quality of perception that is expected when Ruskin invites the reader to look and see. He then turns his readers' attention to the manufactured environment that immediately surrounds them: 'Look round this English room of yours, about which you have been proud so often . . . . Examine again all those accurate mouldings, and perfect polishings . . . . Alas! if read rightly, these perfectnesses are signs of a slavery in our England.'[30] The lessons in perception that Ruskin writes into the reader's mind represent a prefatory, sensory tuning that then allows him to proceed in the reader's company to an interpretation of Gothic architecture ('go forth to gaze upon the old cathedral front'[31]) as a material trace of medieval structures of morality, labour, and creativity. He writes to introduce the reader to 'the idea of reading a building as we would read Milton or Dante, and getting the same kind of delight out of the stones as out of the stanzas'.[32] Culture, in this essay, consists of every material thing at hand, from chairs and tables to buildings and beads.[33] The goal is to prepare the reader's senses to understand the value of invention, the beauty of failure, the dangers of exact finish and of mechanical copying, which should then, in turn, lead to a transformation in the reader's

[28] On ekphrasis and the essay more generally, see Kara Wittman's 'Of human suffering: the essay and ekphrasis' in this volume (Ch. 40).
[29] Ruskin, *Unto This Last*, p. 80. [30] Ibid., p. 85. [31] Ibid. [32] Ibid., p. 94.
[33] Ibid., p. 88.

thoughts, feelings, and actions towards ethical consumption and a felt support for anti-industrialist modes of production and labour.

In 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', Arnold states (quoting remarks he made in a previous lecture) that the main goal of critical effort is 'to see the object as in itself it really is'.[34] Arnold's explicit claim for the critic's ability to see the object disinterestedly makes explicit as a critical method the kind of confidence in vision and perspective already found in Carlyle and Ruskin. At the same time, the Arnoldian claim for the critic's capacity to make disinterested critical judgments dramatises a new crisis in critical authority over knowledge as the arts and sciences were defining themselves according to more specialised disciplines. Critics developed their own authorised methods and rhetorical modes for the presentation of knowledge used to signal the authority of their respective domains.[35] Disinterestedness is aloof from practical considerations but not from the mediating nature of the critic's mind. The main point of this critical concept is not to assert a facile claim for critical objectivity, but to free the mind and senses to follow their own nature, unencumbered.

Arnold's 'Function of Criticism at the Present Time' established new terms and qualities with which to describe and perform the tone, character and enactment of critical authority by making the case for criticism as a mode of observation and thought that rises above a 'practical' view of matters.[36] Here, Arnold asserts the need for a critical 'language innocent enough' to make 'the spotless purity of our intentions evident' to practical-minded citizens; this critical task is formidable because 'people' are 'so immersed . . . in practical life' that they are 'indisposed even to comprehend that without this free disinterested treatment of things, truth and the highest culture are out of the question'.[37] To accomplish this, Arnold redefined

[34] Arnold, 'The function of criticism', p. 1.

[35] As Ian Small has argued, 'Authority became the central issue for disciplines of knowledge after 1870, because these disciplines were in competition with each other and offered different explanations of human society. Moreover, the manner in which authority was to be established itself became problematic after 1870, because, as there were competing epistemologies, so there were competing models of authority.' See Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 30.

[36] As Chris Baldick has noted, Arnold created 'a new kind of critical discourse which could, by its display of careful extrication from controversy, speak from a privileged standpoint, all other discourses being in some way compromised by partial or partisan considerations'. See Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848–1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 25.

[37] Arnold, 'The function of criticism', pp. 26–7.

criticism as a detached, liberated mode of thought, not objective, but 'on a path to vitality' (as David Russell puts it[38]) through a free play that unfolds outside practical concerns:

> The rule may be summed up in one word, – *disinterestedness*. And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from practice; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches; by steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them.[39]

Arnold's critical claim of disinterestedness is both antithetical to the eighteenth-century essayist's more limited or empirical claims to truth and individual perspective, and a most essayistic gambit designed to protect the limited purview of the critic by forwarding a claim for its more general significance. The assertion of the critic as a figure who *can* 'see the object as in itself it really is' preserves the value of an individual (essayistic) way of seeing at a time when disciplinary methods of observation and knowledge verification were relegating the observations of the individual essayist to the realm of subjective taste and opinion.

Pater thickens Arnold's method of critical perception by transforming the essay into a scientifically precise form of subjective inquiry. As a process described in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, it begins with an invitation to the reader to fix upon a single moment of 'that which is without – our physical life', as Pater identifies a momentary interval 'of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat' as his own example.[40] This is Pater's first step in explaining how 'our physical life is a perpetual motion' of the combination of natural elements that constitute things, and of our own movements of sensory perception.[41] From the outer, Pater moves to an account of 'the inward world of thought and feeling' where the 'whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring'.[42] Critical analysis, occurring in 'infinitely divisible' time, is described as an attempt to apprehend (Pater's preferred term for critical observation) 'all that is actual' in a fleeting moment.[43] The act of apprehension involves the formation of its object (the thing) through a series of refined determinations about the

[38] Russell, *Tact*, p. 74. [39] Arnold, 'The function of criticism', p. 18.
[40] W. Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. D.L. Hill (1893; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 186.
[41] Ibid., p. 186. [42] Ibid., p. 187. [43] Ibid., p. 188.

experience of a world in flux with equally animated faculties of perception: 'It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves.'[44]

Pater's essays illustrate to the reader in sensuous detail a Hegelian process (and Pater lectured on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel at Oxford[45]) of the critical object as both internally differentiated (*'a thing of many properties'*[46]) and unified through a perceiver's differentiation of it from other forms. This essay in cultural criticism, in other words, presents the dialectic of perceived determinateness of the critical object that arises through differentiation and opposition in the definition of a thing as something with singularity and unique characteristics.[47] While Pater's account may seem to undermine the Victorian critic's authority to draw general truths from his observations, and thus to signal a kind of regression back into an essayistic subjective empiricism verging on solipsism at the expense of Arnoldian 'disinterestedness', Pater's critical method attributes a substantial degree of agency to the critic as one who may control his expression of critical impressions, navigate and shape the historically variegated medium of language with a scientific style of asceticism, and thus still offer the critical perception of aesthetic experience as a generalisable message in writing.[48] Style, the subject of Pater's opening essay in *Appreciations* (1889), becomes the way apprehensions of an individual may become, through critical analysis and expression in language, of general consequence. This helps explain the seemingly paradoxical statement near the end of Pater's essay on style, where he declares, 'If the style be the man, in all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense "impersonal".'[49]

[44] Ibid.

[45] K. Andrews, 'Pater and the British reception of German Idealism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 72:3 (2011), 438.

[46] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 69.

[47] As Hegel describes this phase in the process of critical observation: 'This determinateness, which constitutes the essential character of the thing, and which differentiates it from all others, is now determined in such a way that the thing thereby is in opposition to others but is supposed to preserve itself for itself in that opposition.' See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 76.

[48] In his account of Pater, positivist science, and solipsism, George Levine argues that 'despite Pater's apparent passion for the fleeting and unstable' neither 'solipsism, [n]or its cousin relativism' was 'a possible resting place': Levine, 'Two ways not to be a solipsist: art and science, Pater and Pearson'; *Victorian Studies*, 43:1 (2000), 16.

[49] W. Pater, *Appreciations, With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 35.

The urgency to maintain or renew cultural unity is manifest as a rearguard motive that works in tandem with the progressive, processual dynamism of the essay as form, and, in some cases, with the explicitly progressive politics of the cultural critics themselves. Despite the different underlying political ideologies of Victorian cultural critics, there is significant consistency in their rhetorical methods, and in their underlying thesis that the parts contributing to a culture and society are more desirable when they are reflective of, or assembled as, an integrated whole.[50] The seriousness of the Victorian essay in criticism arose in no small part from this investment in the idea of cultural wholeness as a dynamic mode of inclusive perception, and its concern with how a coherent or common culture might be retained, revived, or cultivated. While there were many part/whole relationships to theorise in the Victorian period – from cell theory to Charles Darwin's theory of species, to new forms of global imperialism – the relationship that most concerned the Victorian essayist as a cultural critic was that of the individual to culture, and society in a broader sense.

Arnold's dictum 'to see the object as in itself it really is' famously went through several more transformations as the Victorian essay moved towards the end of the nineteenth century. In Pater's preface to *The Renaissance*, the disinterested critic, working to prepare the cultural terrain for the future growth of true art and poetry, becomes the aesthetic critic whose goal is no longer 'to see the object as in itself it really is' but rather 'to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly'.[51] In a subsequent paradoxical formulation by Oscar Wilde, the goal of critical perception would become 'to see the object as in itself it really is not'.[52] Each of these reformulations of Arnoldian disinterestedness attends to the project of the critical essay with intense awareness of historical, mediating factors of observation and truth.

Historicity of the Victorian Essay

Theodor Adorno remarks how the essay defends the transitory as a given condition of thought and observation and thus resists and revolts against

[50] For discussion of the multiple levels on which conceptual models of part/whole relationships were used to theorise the structure of the world in Victorian literature and science, see R. Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole, 1859–1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), esp. pp. 163–6.

[51] Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. xix.

[52] O. Wilde, 'The critic as artist' in *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. L. Dowling (1890–1; New York: Penguin, 2001), p. 240.

doctrines of argumentative formulations that aim for conceptual closure.[53] The Victorian's particular contribution to essayistic revolt against doctrine may be his obsession with historicity, a phenomenology, one might say, of the significance of one's location as a cultural observer in a long historical stream of events, ideas, and lives. When a Victorian essayist makes trans-historical claims using concepts that seem to tremble with authority and authenticity due to secret truths concealed by jargon, he does so with awareness of the historically contingent contours of such assertions and assigns the confidence of his arguments to a conditional future. That this awareness extends beyond historical and material location to the new particulars surrounding publication media and their impact on language is apparent throughout the period, but is especially important in the late Victorian critical writings of Morris and Wilde.

The approach of cultural critique through explication of what words *really* mean, a common technique of the essayist, is explored in elaborate and systematically brilliant forms by these two critics. Morris's essay 'The Socialist Ideal: Art' proceeds by contrasting the commercialist's view of an artless world with the socialist's view: 'The Socialist . . . sees in this obvious lack of art a *disease* peculiar to modern civilisation and hurtful to humanity; and furthermore believes it to be a disease which can be remedied.'[54] The remedy, Morris says, will come with a re-education of the senses, the first ingredient being a correction of the terms we use to describe the world. He opens the essay by redefining the final key word of its title:

> Before I go further I must explain that I use the word *art* in a wider sense than is commonly used amongst us to-day; . . . To the Socialist a house, a knife, a cup, a steam engine, or what not, anything, I repeat, that is made by man and has form, must either be a work of art or destructive to art.[55]

For Morris in his time, art could only serve as a remembrance of a previously organic society. As for Arnold and Ruskin, true art was not fully possible under present conditions. Still, Morris argued that art-making was worthwhile for the purpose of presenting images to people of the industrial working class, whose senses were narrowed by repetitive labour, to give them a desire for beauty they could not easily cultivate otherwise.

While Morris, in addressing a middle-class readership in 'The Socialist Ideal: Art', was especially careful to explain the meaning of his key words

[53] Adorno, 'Essay as form', 158.
[54] W. Morris, 'The socialist ideal: art', *New Review*, 4 (January 1891), 1. [55] Ibid.

from a non-commercialist perspective, Wilde took this approach to a further critical extreme in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', where the corruption of language becomes the primary critical concern. If one thinks of Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) as a novelistic glossary of terms for the socialist future (with William Guest, the narrator, basically asking what this or that means, or discovering that words he once used no longer have meaning in the socialist future), Wilde's essay can be thought of as a critique of language as an adamantine medium in the present. 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' offers a metacritical discussion of what makes essayistic encounters impossible at the present time, hence, Wilde's inversion of Arnold's critical dictum from seeing the object as it really is, with a faith in language as a medium of such encounter, to a more sceptical view of language that requires one to see the object as it is not, if one is to approximate seeing truly at all.

A key premise of Wilde's work is that language becomes corrupt when it is used by one individual or group to dominate another. Wilde dramatised such scenarios in some of the critical pieces of *Intentions*, as at the end of 'The Critic as Artist' when Ernest and Gilbert, the essay's two speakers engaged in dialogue, run the risk of coming too much under each other's influence. Similarly, in 'The Decay of Lying', Vivian reiterates his doctrines of the new aesthetics, but before Cyril can fully subscribe to these doctrines, Vivian intervenes and says, 'Come! We have talked enough.'[56] He seems to wish to avoid wholly convincing his interlocutor, thus forestalling the moment when conversational thinking is fixed into dogma. In 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', Wilde's primary position is against the status quo, identified as 'the public' that has been corrupted by 'the new authority' of 'prejudice, stupidity, cant, and twaddle' that is produced by journalism.[57] The word 'authority' and its cognates appear almost thirty times, and Wilde's obsession with the false authority of the press and its corrupting effects in the form of an oppressive and retrograde 'public opinion' is evident, as he assumes the critical position of one who can see past the misuse of language at the present time to the true meaning of words as they would signify in a fully realised culture: 'When they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true.'[58] Wilde does not complain about the public's

[56] O. Wilde, 'The decay of lying: an observation' in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, p. 192.
[57] O. Wilde, 'The soul of man under socialism' in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, p. 147.
[58] Ibid., pp. 144–5.

misuse of words, as he notes, 'it comes from the natural inability of a community corrupted by authority to understand or appreciate Individualism'.[59] Wilde's style in this essay and his other late works in criticism is directed by paradox and aphorism to reveal how language is a plastic medium shaped by the ethical contexts that determine its meanings and effects. In identifying individualism as the antidote to 'a community corrupted by authority', Wilde is extending the Victorian critic's method of aesthetic pedagogy to an increasingly media-saturated society.

The Victorian cultural critics considered in this chapter have gained lasting reputations for the way their styles of writing complement their goals as agents of aesthetic education. Those styles, however distinct, share an awareness of the necessity of mediation in any written pursuit of knowledge. I wish to close by noting the usefulness of Adorno's observation (a reiteration of some assertions already rehearsed) that 'the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy'.[60] One might say that all cultural critics are heretical or radical critics insofar as they mobilise the essay, and particular conceptions of culture, to critique the status quo. For radical conservatives, radical socialists, radical materialists, radical aesthetes, or radical liberals, the essay form complements the radicalism of their respective political positions.[61] Can one say of any Victorian essay in criticism that it is heretical in its innermost form? That it makes visible an object that orthodoxy had secretly aimed to hide from view? Yes. This is exactly the aim of the Victorian essayists who engaged in cultural critique. Their use of the essay form was intended to transform the reader's perception and understanding of the terms that constitute a historically situated Victorian moral vocabulary, and to imagine better meanings for those words.

[59] Ibid., p. 147. [60] Adorno, 'Essay as form', 171.
[61] For a useful summary of conservative, liberal, and socialist conceptions of culture and their related models of sharing culture or forming a culture in common, see Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, pp. 107–24.

24

Nineteenth-Century Reviews Reviewed

ROBERT MORRISON

'Reviewing spreads with strange vigour', Thomas Carlyle declared in an *Edinburgh Review* essay of 1831. 'By and by it will be found that all Literature has become one boundless self-devouring Review.'[1] Carlyle's remarks are striking not only for their irony – a damning review of reviews published in the most prestigious review of the age – but also for their representation of reviewing as steadily drawing together 'all Literature', creating a kind of cultural vortex in which reviews extend their influence outward even as they cannibalistically consume their rivals and themselves. The spectacular rise of the reviews over the course of the opening decades of the nineteenth century took the review essay (for all Carlyle's misgivings) to peaks of popularity and influence unknown either before or since.

The review had its origins in the seventeenth-century transition of print culture from the court to the coffeehouse, and became a staple of the eighteenth-century publishing industry, initially in newspapers and magazines, and then with the establishment of periodicals dedicated exclusively to book reviewing. *The Edinburgh Review*, however, effected the most dramatic and enduring transformation of the review essay. Founded in 1802, it wound its Whiggish politics around almost all subject matter, imbued each article with new levels of confidence and severity, and demonstrated previously unheard-of generosity in terms of wages and word allowances. A formidable rival emerged in 1809 in the conservative-minded *Quarterly Review*, which was clearly modelled on the *Edinburgh* even as it opposed it, and which soon showed itself equally capable of belligerence and dismissiveness.

The rancour meted out by and between the two leading reviews engaged readers, galled authors, and soon spread to other prominent periodical publications, including monthly magazines like *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*, to

[1] T. Carlyle, Art. IV, 'Characteristics', *Edinburgh Review*, 54 (December 1831), 370.

say nothing of the poets, satirists, pamphleteers, novelists, autobiographers, and preface writers who denounced, exploited, and fictionalised the tactics of the reviews in their own work. On one level, reviewing produced deep divisions in the public sphere, leading to bitter wars of words and, in some instances, to actual duels, as one hostile reviewer faced down another or an infuriated author took aim at his antagonist. But on a deeper level, it bound all members of the periodical press together in the pursuit of notoriety and sales. As William Hazlitt acknowledged in the *Edinburgh* in 1823, *'periodical criticism is favourable – to periodical criticism'*.[2]

Reviews Rising

From the start, the review essay was closely aligned with commercial enterprise, and also with the formats and demands of the periodical press. For centuries as the nation was developing, the royal family and its circle had enjoyed timely access to new information and useful ideas, but in the early 1600s aspirant booksellers, publishers, writers, and entrepreneurs began to take control of the printed word. Their goal was to expand and create reading audiences that were interested in purchasing knowledge and learning about current events, and they soon offered a wide range of publications, extending from bawdy scandal sheets all the way to the philosophical transactions of learned societies.

Popular periodicals began to emerge towards the end of the seventeenth century, including Roger L'Estrange's *Observator* (1681–7), John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* (1691–7), and Ned Ward's *English Lucian* (1698). By the end of the century, booksellers, publishers, journalists, and periodical writers were taking the lead role in fostering public debate, shaping political opinion, and deepening literary intelligence, the combination of which gradually gave rise to what we would now call 'public opinion'. Increasingly, an awareness of new knowledge – including the most recent book publications – was seen as a way to raise one's social status, as well as a marker of what it meant to participate and deliberate in polite society.

Richard Steele and Joseph Addison produced the first major periodicals, initially in their thrice-weekly *Tatler* (1709–11), and then in their daily *Spectator* (1711–14), in which literary criticism and book and theatrical reviews were regular features. Steele wrote often of the stage, reviewing

[2] W. Hazlitt, 'The periodical press', *Edinburgh Review*, 38 (May 1823), 349–50; original italics.

contemporary productions of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, Susanna Centlivre's *The Busie Body*, and William Congreve's *Love for Love*. Addison produced articles on wit, tragedy, the ballad, the imagination, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), alongside review essays on recent publications such as Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1731–1922), founded by Edward Cave as the first British monthly magazine, was a digest of the latest news and knowledge from the periodical press, designed to appeal to gentlemen who wanted to stay informed but simply did not have time to read everything. Entertaining and affordably priced, *The Gentleman's Magazine* made books a priority, with lists of the most recent publications in each issue and book reviews that were initially brief, but that gradually became longer and more numerous, with generous excerpts from the text under review, though little in the way of critical commentary.

Reviewing entered the British publishing mainstream when Ralph Griffiths established his *Monthly Review* (1749–1845), the first journal devoted wholly to comprehensive coverage of the book trade. Adopting a policy of anonymous reviewing, and featuring contributors such as Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Burney, and Alexander Hamilton, *The Monthly Review* offered itself as a kind of guide on which books to buy in an increasingly crowded print market. In the decades that followed, sales of each issue grew steadily from 1,000 to 5,000 as book clubs, literary societies, circulating libraries, the industrialisation of the book trade, and changes to copyright laws dramatically increased demand for both books and assessments of them.[3] Competition soon arrived in the form of *The Critical Review* (1756–1817), which was initially edited by Tobias Smollett as a Tory- and Church-oriented response to the liberalism of *The Monthly Review*, and which counted Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson among its reviewers. Johnson preferred *The Critical Review*, not only because of its Toryism, but also because, though its contributors often wrote reviews 'without reading the books through', they knew how to 'lay hold of a topick, and write chiefly from their own minds'; the *Monthly*, by contrast, was put together by 'duller men' who were 'glad to read the books through'.[4]

The popularity of the *Monthly* and the *Critical* inextricably tied together book publishing and book reviewing, and prompted a number of publishers and writers to launch rival publications. Gilbert Stuart and William Smellie

[3] W. St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 572.
[4] J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 740.

produced *The Edinburgh Magazine and Review* (1773–6), and while it was too bilious and provincial to last long, it set the model for a review journal that was proudly Scottish, critically audacious, and politically progressive. William Kenrick, editor of *The London Review of English and Foreign Literature* (1775–80), outdid Stuart and Smellie in his fondness for vicious personal reviewing. Stuart himself went on to become the first editor of *The English Review* (1783–96), which featured contributions by William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft, and several other radical intellectuals. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 infused reviewing with a new political urgency. *The Analytical Review* (1788–99) aligned itself with the ideas of the French revolutionaries, and published reviews by Mary Wollstonecraft, Henry Fuseli, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Conservatives fought back with the establishment of *The British Critic* (1793–1843), a bastion of High Church orthodoxy, and the monthly *Anti-Jacobin Review* (1798–1821), a successor to *The Anti-Jacobin* (1797–8), a weekly edited by William Gifford and best known for its brilliant wit and savagely satiric attacks on Godwin, Erasmus Darwin, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey.

The Edinburgh Review

To some extent, *The Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929) consolidated the achievements of the eighteenth-century review journals, publishing anonymous reviews by many of the leading authors of the day, combining erudition with combativeness and critical insight, and refining the example of previous Scottish reviewers like Stuart and Smollett, who had clearly relished 'delivering advice to the English in tones of moral and intellectual superiority', as Marilyn Butler observes.[5] Yet the *Edinburgh* was also strikingly new. Founded by Sydney Smith, Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, and Francis Horner, and published by Archibald Constable, it appeared every quarter rather than every month, it paid its contributors the unprecedented sum of ten guineas a sheet, it remained largely detached from the book trade, and it immediately established itself as more authoritative and prestigious than its older competitors, though it took several issues before its sales figures surpassed those of the *Monthly* and the *Critical*.[6]

[5] M. Butler, 'Culture's medium: the role of the review' in S. Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 141.

[6] D. Roper, *Reviewing before the* Edinburgh, *1788–1802* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), p. 24.

Edited from its second number onward by Jeffrey, the *Edinburgh* was dominated by the work of its four founders, but in its first decade reviews also appeared by Coleridge, Walter Scott, Humphry Davy, William Wilberforce, Robert Malthus, and James Mill; and while it reviewed far fewer titles than its competitors, it nevertheless examined the same broad range of topics, from emigration, science, education, and travel literature through translation, religion, philosophy, and history to economics, engineering, architecture, classical literature, and the latest novels, poems, and plays. 'The effect was electrical', declared Henry Cockburn: 'The learning of the new Journal, its talent, its spirit, its writing, its independence, were all new.' Cockburn was a close personal friend of Jeffrey, but even allowing for his bias, it is clear that the arrival of the *Edinburgh* 'opened a new chapter in the history of literary criticism', as Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu remark.[7]

At the core of the *Edinburgh* is a contradiction. On the one hand, it deplored injustice and gave vigorous support to the key liberal-cum-radical issues of the early nineteenth century. When it was launched, Sydney Smith recalled, 'the Catholics were not emancipated – the Corporation and Test Acts unrepealed – the Game Laws were horribly oppressive', and 'the enormous wickedness of the Slave Trade was tolerated'.[8] By the end of Jeffrey's editorship in 1829, the *Edinburgh*'s boldness and nonconformity had helped to lessen or remove all of these 'evils', and three years later Parliament addressed a problem, one that had preoccupied Jeffrey from the early years of the *Edinburgh*, when it passed major reforms of the representative system. Conservatives repeatedly denounced the *Edinburgh* as irreligious and unpatriotic, but for liberals like Hazlitt it was 'eminently characteristic of the Spirit of the Age', which he defined as 'the progress of intellectual refinement, warring with our natural infirmities'.[9]

Yet, on the other hand, the *Edinburgh* was commonly believed to be the voice of aristocratic Whiggery, and it was deeply invested in various excessive forms of literary and social conservatism. Nowhere is this more evident

[7] H. Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1852), vol. 1, p. 131; M. Demata and D. Wu, Introduction to *British Romanticism and the Edinburgh Review: Bicentennary Essays*, ed. Demata and Wu (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 2.

[8] S. Smith, Preface to *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839), vol. 1, p. vi.

[9] J. Clive, *Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 86–7; W. Hazlitt, 'Mr Jeffrey' and 'On the pleasure of hating' in P.P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–4), vol. 11, p. 127, and vol. 12, pp. 128–9, respectively.

than in its response to the poetry of Wordsworth and Southey, which provoked intense hostility in Jeffrey. Bravely in favour of scrutinising traditions and structures in the political realm, Jeffrey was scathingly dismissive of the attempts of Wordsworth and Southey to reform British poetry, as he makes clear in the inaugural number of the *Edinburgh* when he damns Southey's epic poem *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and brands him as a member of a '*sect* of poets' that the *Edinburgh* later rebranded as the 'Lake school'. 'Poetry', Jeffrey insisted, 'has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago, by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question.'[10] The works of Wordsworth and Southey were plainly prepared to break these laws and call Jeffrey's 'fixed' standards into question, leading Jeffrey to conclude that a 'splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society, seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments'.[11] Conservatives of course made similar accusations about the *Edinburgh*'s attitude towards many of 'the existing institutions of society', including Parliament and the Church, but Jeffrey persisted in lashing the Lakers for years. In John Stuart Mill's memorable formulation, Jeffrey sacrificed Wordsworth and Southey 'at the altar of aristocratic prejudice'.[12]

Praise from Jeffrey was possible, for on occasion he relinquished his eighteenth-century allegiances to embrace contemporary literature, as when in his review of Walter Scott's 1815 edition of Jonathan Swift he announced that he was of the opinion 'that the writers who adorned the beginning of the last century have been eclipsed by those of our own time'.[13] Maria Edgeworth, Madame de Staël, and Felicia Hemans were among the authors Jeffrey lauded in the *Edinburgh*, as were Lord Byron and perhaps most notably John Keats. Yet vitriol was also an indispensable ingredient in almost all Jeffrey's reviews, and in no small measure because, then as now, it was good for business. 'I think we should make one or two examples of great delinquents in every number', Jeffrey urged Horner at the end of the *Edinburgh*'s first year, and it was a policy he pursued across his editorship.[14] Fellow *Edinburgh* reviewer Sydney Smith, nowhere near as bloodthirsty as

[10] F. Jeffrey, 'Southey's *Thalaba*', *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (October 1802), 63; F. Jeffrey, 'Some observations on the *Biographia Literaria* of S.T. Coleridge Esq. – 1817', *Edinburgh Review*, 28 (August 1817), 501, 509.
[11] Jeffrey, 'Southey's *Thalaba*', 71.
[12] J.S. Mill, 'Periodical literature', *Westminster Review*, 1 (April 1824), 516.
[13] F. Jeffrey, 'Scott's *Edition of Swift*', *Edinburgh Review*, 27 (September 1816), 2.
[14] Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, vol. 2, p. 86.

Jeffrey, urged restraint as early as 1804, and did so with the wit that in his reviews helped leaven some of the *Edinburgh*'s asperities. 'What's a guinea but a damned yellow circle?', he asked Jeffrey pointedly: 'What's a chamber-pot but an infernal hollow sphere? The whole effort of your mind is to destroy.'[15]

The impact of the *Edinburgh*'s reviews on authors was of course severe, and they soon retaliated. John Ring did so with anger in *The Beauties of the Edinburgh Review, alias the Stinkpot of Literature*: 'instead of bestowing praise where due', the *Edinburgh* 'makes war on the whole host of authors; and mangles them without mercy'.[16] Edward Copleston deployed fine irony in *Advice to a Young Reviewer*, noting that there are many reasons 'why all my instructions are pointed towards the censure, and not the praise of books; but . . . the chief are, that this part is both easier, and will sell better'.[17] Henry Brougham mocked Lord Byron in his appraisal of *Hours of Idleness* (1807), enraging the poet, who 'was not easy till I had vented my wrath and my rhyme' in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809).[18] Byron's attempt to vanquish the *Edinburgh* was ultimately self-defeating, for his attacks on his poetic rivals – Wordsworth in particular – are clearly indebted to the critical opinions of the *Edinburgh*, paradoxically aligning Byron with the review that he is ostensibly bent on condemning. It was a trap laid by the *Edinburgh* that took many prisoners, and that only confirmed its critical authority and inescapable influence.

Jeffrey was not responsible for the *Edinburgh* review of *Hours of Idleness* (Byron mistakenly thought he was), but he too provoked the fury of poets. When he sneered at Thomas Moore's *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems* (1806) as 'a public nuisance', Moore was so angry he challenged Jeffrey to a duel, though the police arrested the would-be combatants before shots were fired.[19] 'This will never do', Jeffrey declared as the opening blow in his thrashing of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814).[20] Friends like Thomas De Quincey urged the poet to let it pass, but after years of suffering critical

[15] S. Smith quoted in N.C. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), vol. 1, pp. 95–6.
[16] J. Ring, *The Beauties of the Edinburgh Review, alias the Stinkpot of Literature* (London: Symonds, 1807), p. 1.
[17] E. Copleston, *Advice to a Young Reviewer* (Oxford: J. Parker & J. Cooke, 1807), p. 8.
[18] Lord Byron [George Gordon], *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. Marchand, 12 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973–82), vol. 3, p. 213.
[19] F. Jeffrey, 'Moore, *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems*', *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (July 1806), 456; R. Kelly, *Bard of Erin: The Life of Thomas Moore* (Dublin: Penguin, 2008), pp. 139–47.
[20] F. Jeffrey, 'Wordsworth, *The Excursion*', *Edinburgh Review*, 24 (November 1814), 1.

vilification in silence, Wordsworth rose to the bait. Without explicitly naming Jeffrey, he attacked him in his 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface' (1815) as the leader of those critics of 'palsied imaginations and indurated hearts'.[21] Again, without identifying him but with Jeffrey even more clearly in his sights, in *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816) Wordsworth pitches into Jeffrey as an 'infatuated slanderer' who possesses 'a mind obtuse, superficial, and inept'.[22] Jeffrey is a ubiquitous presence in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), where Coleridge, like Byron before him, vigorously rejects Jeffrey's authority and methodology even as he operates in accord with them. Declares William Christie: 'The "defects" thrown up by Coleridge's detailed practical criticism of Wordsworth in the second volume, for example – "INCONSTANCY of the *style*"; "*matter-of-fact-ness*"; "an undue predilection for the *dramatic* form"; "an intensity of feeling disproportionate"; "thoughts and images too great for the subject" – *all* of these are to be found in Jeffrey's *Edinburgh* reviews.'[23]

Carlyle, during the late 1820s, was on surprisingly close terms with Jeffrey, but when their relationship broke down, he channelled his complicated frustrations – with Jeffrey's scepticism, materialism, cynicism, Whiggism – into *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4) and Diogenes Teufelsdröckh's bitter satire on 'pure reason' and logic-chopping. Jeffrey, for his part, condemned the anti-social, Germanic, arrogant spirituality he found in Carlyle, as he did the mysticisms and private mythologies of Wordsworth and Coleridge. 'You know I do not myself set much value on the paradoxes and exaggerations in which you delight', he told Carlyle frankly in 1834.[24]

The Quarterly Review

The most substantial challenge to Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh*, however, came not from individual attacks but from the combined conservative talent that produced *The Quarterly Review* (1809–1967), which went toe to toe with the *Edinburgh* on all the major issues of the day, and which countered the *Edinburgh*'s advocacy of progress, reason, and secular humanism by championing nationalism, religious faith, and Britain's superiority as a cultural,

[21] W. Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. 3, p. 66.
[22] Ibid., p. 127.
[23] W. Christie, *The Edinburgh Review in the Literary Culture of Romantic Britain* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), p. 120.
[24] T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. R. Tarr and M. Engel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 53; F. Jeffrey, *The Letters of Francis Jeffrey to Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. W. Christie (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), p. 144.

manufacturing, and colonial power. The *Quarterly* exploited the same formats, pay scales, word limits, selectivity, ferocity, and wide range of subject matter as the *Edinburgh*, but was written not for those who wanted to reform or enlighten their country but for 'those who love their country, and . . . those whom we would wish to love it', as Walter Scott put it after he became so disaffected with the *Edinburgh* that he cut his ties with it and helped to establish the *Quarterly*.[25] William Gifford, who had served as editor of the weekly *Anti-Jacobin*, became the *Quarterly*'s first editor, involving him in an often bitter tug-of-war with the publisher John Murray over the journal's tone and direction. Gifford's habitual inability to deliver the *Quarterly* on time, coupled with his often drastic editorial interventions, caused further problems, and especially irritated Southey, a prolific *Quarterly* reviewer.

Yet the *Quarterly* was a success from the start, and by 1818 its sales per issue reached as high as 14,000 copies compared to 12,000 for the *Edinburgh*.[26] Politics – as in the *Edinburgh* – were at the *Quarterly*'s core, but it aimed too at diversity and novelty in order to make its appeal as broad as possible, drawing contributors from across the conservative spectrum as the *Edinburgh* reached across the progressive spectrum, publishing reviews from avowed liberals such as Thomas Arnold and Macvey Napier (a future editor of the *Edinburgh*), and even writing to the radical Leigh Hunt to solicit a comprehensive assessment of the English drama.[27] Charles Robert Maturin, Edward Copleston, and Charles Lamb contributed to the *Quarterly* during its first decade, but, like the *Edinburgh*, it owed its popularity to a small number of reviewers who wrote a great number of articles.

Between 1809 and 1839, Southey produced nearly 100 essays for the *Quarterly* on an extraordinary range of books, yet what stands out is 'his ability to gear almost any topic to the *Quarterly*'s commitment to supporting the government', as W.A. Speck remarks.[28] John Barrow, Second Secretary to the Admiralty and an invaluable government insider, published more than 200 reviews in the *Quarterly* and played a pivotal role in generating nineteenth-century enthusiasm for travel and exploration literature as well as for Britain's imperial objectives. John Wilson Croker, an Irishman, leaned

[25] J.G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: J. Constable, 1902–3), vol. 3, pp. 113–14.
[26] St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 573.
[27] J. Cutmore, *Contributors to the Quarterly Review: A History, 1809–1825* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), pp. 29, 194, 211.
[28] W.A. Speck, 'Robert Southey's contribution to the *Quarterly Review*' in J. Cutmore (ed.), *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), p. 168.

to the political left on a number of issues, most notably Catholic Emancipation, but that did not prevent him from writing ferocious reviews of Lady Morgan's *France* (1817), Keats's *Endymion* (1818), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Walter Scott demonstrated the more insightful and objective side of *Quarterly* reviewing in his largely favourable assessments of Byron's *Childe Harold, Canto III* (1816), and *Childe Harold, Canto IV* (1818) as well as in his generous review of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815).

The viciousness of the *Quarterly*'s attacks, and the lengths to which it was willing to go to defend or excuse the government, drew impassioned repudiations from reviewees, an indication of the power they believed the review had to drive or destroy sales. Lady Morgan, outraged by Croker's onslaughts, tarred the *Quarterly* in the 'Preface' to *France* for the 'anonymous slander with which party spirit arms its strictures'.[29] More effectively, in her novel *Florence Macarthy* (1818), she satirised Croker as the loathsome Conway Crawley, whose 'bilious saturnine constitution' turned 'his words to sarcasm, his ink to gall, and his pen to a stiletto'.[30] Percy Bysshe Shelley was convinced that the *Quarterly*'s 'savage criticism' of Keats had hastened the poet's death, as he remarks in the 'Preface' to *Adonais* (1821), while in the poem it is clear that Shelley's anger at the abuse heaped by the *Quarterly* on Keats mirrors the anger he himself felt at the way he had been treated in the *Quarterly*, especially in its scathing review of *The Revolt of Islam* (1818).[31] In *Don Juan* (1819–24), Byron took Keats's supposed death at the hands of reviewers rather more whimsically: '"Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle, / Should let itself be snuffed out by an Article'.[32]

Gifford wrote only five *Quarterly* reviews by himself, but he produced at least a dozen more in collaboration with other *Quarterly* contributors, and his position as the known editor among anonymous reviewers meant that he came to be seen as an embodiment of the *Quarterly*'s worst excesses. Hazlitt hated him, and after three hostile reviews of his work in the *Quarterly*, he fired back with *A Letter to William Gifford* (1819), a vituperative tour de force. 'You are the *Government Critic*', Hazlitt jeers, 'a character nicely differing from that of a government spy – the invisible link, that connects literature

[29] S. Owenson (Lady Morgan), *France*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1817), vol. 1, p. ix.
[30] S. Owenson (Lady Morgan), *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale*, 4 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1818), vol. 2, pp. 56–7.
[31] P.B. Shelley, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Z. Leader and M. O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 529.
[32] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. McGann, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), vol. 5, p. 483.

with the police.'[33] Gifford responded with a review rubbishing Hazlitt's *Political Essays* (1819), and denouncing the 'ludicrous egotism which has driven this forlorn drudge'.[34] Leigh Hunt, like Hazlitt a repeated target of *Quarterly* slurs, produced *Ultra-Crepidarius: A Satire on William Gifford* (1823), a versified equivalent of Hazlitt's *Letter to William Gifford*, in which Hunt portrays Gifford, a former cobbler, as a shoe personified, 'A thing made for dirty ways, hollow at heart.'[35] Thomas Love Peacock, in his most overtly political novel, *Melincourt* (1817), derided Gifford as Mr Vamp, editor of the *Legitimate Review*. Puncturing the *Quarterly*'s extremism with wit and humorous characterisation, Peacock has Gifford and other Legitimate Reviewers wail, 'The church is in danger! the church is in danger!' whenever rational thinking threatens to infiltrate their meeting and overturn the falsehoods and fearmongering of those championing the dogmas of church and state.[36] 'So we are all, all honourable men!' Mr Vamp exclaims to his conservative cronies, and we will stick by one another until we 'extinguish, totally and finally, the light of the human understanding'.[37]

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine

William Blackwood launched *The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine* in April 1817, but when his two editors proved too cautious and open-minded for his liking, he fired them, took over the role of editor, and relaunched the publication in October as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1980). Belligerently, satirically, audaciously, learnedly High Tory, Blackwood exploited the monthly publishing deadline of the magazines rather than the quarterly schedule of the major reviews to produce a nimbler, more passionate, and immediate alternative to the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, incessantly mocking the former's deleterious Whiggery while running circles around the latter's long-winded Toryism. *Blackwood's*, Mary Russell Mitford reported in 1818, is 'a very libellous, naughty, wicked, scandalous, story-telling, entertaining work – a sort of chapel-of-ease to my old friend, the *Quarterly*'.[38] De Quincey, too, relished the energy and outspokenness of *Blackwood's*, and became not

[33] Hazlitt, 'A letter to William Gifford' in Howe (ed.), *Works*, vol. 9, p. 13.
[34] W. Gifford, 'Hazlitt, *Political Essays*', *Quarterly Review*, 22 (1819), 159.
[35] L. Hunt, *The Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, Vol. 6: *Poetical Works, 1822–1859*, ed. J. Strachan (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), p. 41.
[36] T.L. Peacock, *Melincourt* in H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones (eds.), *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, 10 vols. (London: Constable, 1924–34), vol. 2, p. 403.
[37] Ibid., 416–17.
[38] M.R. Mitford quoted in A.G. L'Estrange, *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, 3 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1870), vol. 2, p. 42.

only a contributor but a commentator on its innovations. 'Undoubtedly the name *Review* has the advantage in point of dignity', he remarked in 1827, but *Magazines* are 'entitled to the precedency'.[39] They are more intimately connected 'with the shifting passions of the day', whereas reviews sometimes had to stoop as low as 'forging titles of pamphlets' in order to 'furnish an excuse for bringing topics of immediate interest before their bar'.[40]

As, fifteen years earlier, Jeffrey and his associates had reimagined the review, so Blackwood and his leading contributors seem to have realised that the magazine format, which had remained essentially unaltered since Cave introduced *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1731, was ripe for change. Rejecting all formal departments, *Blackwood's* mixed together fiction, essays, reviews, letters, squibs, satire, and poetry, infusing exuberance throughout. Some readers disapproved. 'A Berkshire Rector has been pleased to wonder', declared *Blackwood's* in March 1818, 'Why we've dismissed the primitive arrangement, / He hates, he says, from verse to prose to blunder, / Our quick transitions seem to him *derangement*'.[41]

But other readers were far more enthusiastic, and *Blackwood's* soon outpaced its competitors, including *The Monthly Magazine* (1796–1843), and *The New Monthly Magazine* (1814–84). Blackwood had prized reviews even in *The Edinburgh Monthly* version of his magazine, where John Wilson wrote revealingly of Wordsworth's *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (1816) and of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817), while Wilson's assessment of Byron's *Manfred* (1817) 'had all the air of being a poet's, & was a very good one', according to Byron himself.[42] When, however, the magazine was remodelled in October 1817 as *Blackwood's*, the reviewing immediately reached heights of scurrility beyond even the abusiveness of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*. Wilson, probably with the assistance of his close friend De Quincey, demolished Coleridge's *Biographia*, while John Gibson Lockhart – writing pseudonymously as *'Z'* – unleashed the first in his series of strikes on the 'Cockney School of Poetry' and its ringleader, Leigh Hunt. Like the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* before it, *Blackwood's* published review essays that were thoroughly inflected by its politics. 'Mr Hunt cannot utter a dedication, or even a note, without

[39] T. De Quincey, 'Review of *Blackwood's Magazine* for December 1827' in D. Groves (ed.), *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, Vol. 5: *Articles from the Edinburgh Saturday Post, 1827–1828* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2000), p. 149.

[40] Ibid., p. 150.

[41] 'Notices to contributors', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (March 1818), 610.

[42] Lord Byron to John Murray, 12 October 1817, in Marchand (ed.), *Letters and Journals*, vol. 5, p. 269.

betraying the *Shibboleth* of low birth and low habits', scoffed Lockhart: 'His religion is a poor tame dilution of the blasphemies of the *Encyclopaedie* – his patriotism a crude, vague, ineffectual, and sour Jacobinism.'[43]

Coleridge considered legal action, as did Hunt, but the *Blackwood's* reviewers were just getting started. Lockhart condemned Keats's *Endymion* as 'calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy', and returned to assail Hunt with an intensity that bordered on obsession: 'I shall probe you to the core.'[44] Wilson took his turn laying into Cockneys as well, referring to Hunt as 'a fool and a liar', and wondering who would deign to 'spit upon a toad crawling in its unwieldy and freckled putrefaction?'[45] Known associates of the 'Cockney School' also came in for abuse. Lockhart and William Maginn smeared Hazlitt as 'an overgrown pimple, sore to the touch'.[46] Byron in the first two cantos of *Don Juan* had published a poem that was, in Lockhart's view, 'filthy and impious'.[47] George Croly denounced Shelley's *Adonais* as an 'unintelligible' and 'dreary' poem, defaced – like everything Shelley wrote – by a 'predominant irreligion'.[48]

The London Magazine was founded in January 1820 as a direct challenger to *Blackwood's*. The two magazines closely resembled one another in format, and both were devoted primarily to a combination of independent critical opinion and original literary material, though the *London* was a good deal more polished, dispassionate, and liberal in tone. Edited by the Scotsman John Scott, it was soon reviewing *Blackwood's*, and in its fifth issue went so far as to praise its 'ability, energy, and effect'.[49] But before long, relations between the two magazines degenerated into accusations and counter-accusations of pomposity, dishonesty, and unjustified critical abuse. Wilson warned the *London* not to compete too closely with *Blackwood's*: 'We, at present, just civilly ask the Jehu, John Scott, to keep his own side of the road.'[50] Scott shot back that *Blackwood's* was run by men like Wilson and

[43] J.G. Lockhart, 'On the Cockney School of poetry' No. I, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (October 1817), 39.
[44] J.G. Lockhart, 'Letter from Z. to Leigh Hunt', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 3 (May 1818) and 'Cockney School of Poetry' No. IV (August 1818), 201 and 519, respectively.
[45] J. Wilson, '*The Age of Bronze*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 13 (April 1823), 458, 460.
[46] J.G. Lockhart and W. Maginn, 'Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq.' No. VIII, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (July 1823), 221.
[47] J.G. Lockhart, 'Remarks on *Don Juan*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 5 (August 1819), 514.
[48] G. Croly, 'Remarks on Shelley's *Adonais*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 10 (December 1821), 697, 699.
[49] J. Scott, 'Lord Byron', *London Magazine*, 1 (May 1820), 496.
[50] J. Wilson, 'An hour's tete-a-tete with the public', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 8 (October 1820), 105.

Lockhart, 'whose habits of life are notoriously free', and who write for a magazine that revels in 'the most licentious personal abuse'.[51] The climax came in February 1821, when Scott and *Blackwood's* associate Jonathan Christie fought a duel in which Scott was fatally wounded. The incident provoked outrage, but *Blackwood's* was unapologetic. Unlike Keats, who also died in February 1821, Scott actually was killed by the cruelty and recklessness of the periodical press.

Yet its many excesses notwithstanding, *Blackwood's* published some of the most searching reviews of the age, guided in part by its conviction that 'unity of mind, in a Journal like this, is a thing quite below our contempt'.[52] While the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* routinely belittled the Lake Poets, and *Blackwood's* itself treated them with malicious severity in several instances, the magazine also made clear that there was much to be admired in the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth, and especially in their *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a volume that had deeply impressed the teenage Wilson, who was drawn to the democratic impulse of many of the poems. In an 1802 fan letter to Wordsworth, he praised the *Lyrical Ballads* for demonstrating that 'every creature on the face of the Earth is entitled in some measure to our kindness'.[53] Years later, in *Blackwood's*, Wilson declared that Coleridge has 'perhaps the finest superstitious vein of any person alive', while Wordsworth was 'the first man that vindicated the native dignity of human nature'.[54]

Walter Scott thought *Frankenstein* was the work of Percy Shelley, and noted its dedication to Mary Shelley's father, the radical William Godwin, yet he lauded the novel in *Blackwood's* as an 'extraordinary tale, in which the author seems to us to disclose uncommon powers of poetic imagination'. Led by De Quincey, *Blackwood's* praised Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*, while Lockhart – without either de-politicising or aestheticising Shelley – followed up with positive reviews of *Rosalind and Helen* (1819) and, more strikingly, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).[55] *Blackwood's* had been 'hyperbolical in their

[51] J. Scott, '*Blackwood's Magazine*', *London Magazine*, 2 (November 1820), 513.
[52] J.G. Lockhart, 'Lord Byron', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 17 (February 1825), 132.
[53] P. Dundas, 'John Wilson to William Wordsworth (1802): a new text', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34 (2003), 113.
[54] J. Wilson, 'On the use of the preternatural in works of fiction', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 3 (September 1818), 649; J. Wilson, 'Wordsworth's sonnets and memorials', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 12 (August 1822), 175.
[55] W. Scott, 'Remarks on *Frankenstein*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (March 1818), 619; R. Morrison, '"Abuse wickedness, but acknowledge wit": *Blackwood's* and the Shelley Circle', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 34:2 (2001), 147–64.

praise – and diabolical in their abuse' of Byron's poetry, as the poet himself observed; but in 1822, Maginn presciently declared that he would 'rather have written a page' of the libidinous *Don Juan* 'than a ton of Childe Harold', while a year later Lockhart maintained, in stark contrast to his earlier position, 'that *Don Juan* is, without exception, the first of Lord Byron's works'.[56] Even the 'Cockney School' onslaughts indicate just how clearly *Blackwood's* recognised that innovation and non-conformity were at the crux of Hunt's and Keats's poetry. 'In their acute response to forces at work in contemporary literary, social, and political spheres', Nicholas Roe asserts, 'the [Cockney School] essays are comparable to – and certainly as significant as – the "Prefaces" to *Lyrical Ballads*.'[57]

Aftermath

Fraser's Magazine (1830–82) eclipsed the increasingly consistent and respectable *Blackwood's* in the 1830s as the most riotous, intellectual, satiric, and wide-ranging monthly, in no small measure because it patterned itself explicitly on the original *Blackwood's*, and drew to itself so many *Blackwood's* authors, including Lockhart (by this time also editor of the *Quarterly*), John Galt, James Hogg, and David Macbeth Moir, while Maginn served as its editor and most prolific contributor. Carlyle published his *Sartor Resartus* in *Fraser's*, and also served it as a reviewer, as did William Makepeace Thackeray. Maginn's delight in invective continued to shape many of his reviews, and surged in his commentary on Grantley Berkeley's *Berkeley Castle* (1836), where he announced that 'Mr Grantley Berkeley's mother lived with Mr Grantley Berkeley's father as his mistress, and . . . she had at least one child before she could induce the old and very stupid lord to marry her.'[58] Incensed, Berkeley challenged Maginn to a duel, and while Maginn was fortunate to escape unscathed, the incident ended his editorship.

[56] Byron to John Murray, 10 December 1819, in Marchand (ed.), *Letters and Journals*, vol. 6, p. 257; W. Maginn, 'Noctes Ambrosianae' No. IV, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 12 (July 1822), 106; J.G. Lockhart, 'ODoherty on *Don Juan*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (September 1823), 282–3.

[57] N. Roe, 'A Cockney schoolroom: John Keats at Enfield' in M. O'Neill (ed.), *Keats: Bicentenary Readings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 24. For consideration of the 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' in relation to periodical essays, see U. Natarajan's 'The urban familiar essay of the Romantic era' in this volume (Ch. 19).

[58] W. Maginn, 'Mr Grantley Berkeley and his novel', *Fraser's Magazine*, 14 (August 1836), 243.

By the time of Maginn's death in 1842, *Fraser's* was already in the hands of a new owner, who sold it on only five years later. In 1849, the new editor, John William Parker, announced that he was taking the magazine in a direction very different from Maginn's original vision, and indeed from Blackwood's before him. 'The practice of calling hard names and imputing unworthy motives the Magazine has abandoned', Parker declared, 'and is not likely, under its present management, to return to it.'[59] Parker's decision was part of a much broader trend against the slashing reviews and bellicose partisanship of the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, and *Blackwood's*. 'Readers in these kindlier days of criticism', Leigh Hunt asserted in 1850, 'have no conception of the extent to which personal hostility allowed itself to be transported, in the periodicals of those times.'[60]

The fierce conflicts between the leading reviews and magazines of the early nineteenth century at once polarised the public sphere and brought together reviewers who fed off and one-upped each other in the common pursuit of bigger audiences, stronger sales, and an ever more central role for the review essay in British political and cultural life. Yet by the late 1830s, both the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* had gone into decline, their authority and influence in the following decades increasingly usurped by newspaper book reviews and university English departments, and their intellectualism and aspirant middle-class objectives out of step with burgeoning mass readerships more interested in amusement than in serious debate. *Blackwood's* continued to review books from across the publishing world, but from the mid-century onward it owed its success to its serialisation of original fiction by a host of major writers, including Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, and Joseph Conrad.

The legacy of the early nineteenth-century review essay endures, however, in twentieth- and twenty-first-century journals that feature long essays, cover a broad range of books, weave culture and politics together, attract leading writers as reviewers, and combine erudition and authority with wit, opinion pieces, and essays of cultural criticism. *The Times Literary Supplement*, begun in 1902, is thoroughly shaped by the precedent of *The Edinburgh Review*, as is *The London Review of Books*, founded in 1979 by the Scotsman Karl Miller. The latter quickly established 'a new style and voice in British

[59] J.W. Parker, 'A happy new year', *Fraser's Magazine*, 39 (January 1849), 3.
[60] L. Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries*, 3 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1850), vol. 2, p. 99.

higher journalism, a blend of the academic and the traditionally journalistic', in the words of John Sutherland: 'As those with a historical perspective noted, Miller had imported the *Edinburgh Review* into the present day, and into literary London.'[61] Sounding remarkably like Jeffrey, Miller once observed that his ambition with *The London Review of Books* was to produce 'the paper with the least nonsense in it of anywhere in the world'.[62]

[61] J. Sutherland, 'Journalism, scholarship, and the University College London English Department' in J. Treglown and B. Bennett (eds.), *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 70–1; see P. Marks's 'The essay and the public intellectual' in this volume (Ch. 43) for commentary on the latter-day style of journalism.

[62] J. Lanchester, 'Karl Miller remembered', *London Review of Books*, 36 (23 October 2014), 10.

25

Essays in the 'Golden Age' of the British Newspaper

JOANNE SHATTOCK

The repeal of the final stamp duty on newspapers in 1855 was widely regarded as heralding a 'golden age' for journalism, which extended through the following decades.[1] This chapter will explore the essay in British newspapers from the turn of the century to the beginning of modern journalism in the 1880s. The mid-Victorian generation of writers, born in the early decades of the nineteenth century, lived through a period of spectacular growth of the readership and influence of newspapers. The end of the so-called 'Taxes on Knowledge' led to a profusion of new titles – metropolitan and provincial, daily, weekly, and bi-weekly – and an improvement in the quality of existing papers.[2] As the historian Martin Conboy has observed, 'Journalism moved from the margins of English society to a more economically lucrative and socially respectable position.'[3]

Writing in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1855, the essayist and reviewer William Rathbone Greg acknowledged that journalism was 'unquestionably the most grave, noticeable, formidable phenomenon – the greatest FACT – of our times'. Extolling the talent that characterised current newspaper writing, he argued that 'the journalism of the beginning of the century would scarcely pass muster now'.[4] Greg was not alone in pointing to a marked change in the reputation of the newspaper at mid-century. E.S. Dallas and James Fitzjames Stephen (like Greg, prolific contributors to the quarterly reviews and monthly magazines) were equally fulsome in their praise of a transformed

[1] See A.J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1971), pp. 28, 210.

[2] The taxes, designed to curb the power and expansion of the press, were first imposed in 1712, and revised at intervals. They included a stamp on newspapers, a tax on advertisements, and a duty on paper.

[3] M. Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History* (London: Sage, 2004), p. 125.

[4] W.R. Greg, 'The newspaper press', *Edinburgh Review*, 102 (October 1855), 470, 483.

and expanding daily and weekly press.[5] Until the mid-century, most writers had distinguished between newspapers and other forms of periodical writing.

In the second half of the century, however, capital investment, new technologies in production and distribution, and the gradual professionalisation of journalism made writing for newspapers, as distinct from reviews and magazines, more attractive to members of various professions.[6] In the opening section of this chapter, I show how the essay developed in newspapers in the form of leaders (resembling today's editorials), middles, correspondence columns, and reviews. While professional journalists tended to adapt to the conventions of the papers that employed them, in the second part of the chapter, I examine the newspaper writing of John Stuart Mill, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, each of whom, I argue, put their own stamp on the newspapers for which they wrote. All three were innovative journalists, whether their engagement with newspapers was brief, as was the case with Eliot, or continued throughout their writing career, as with Mill and Dickens.

The Literary Marketplace

In 1833, Gibbons Merle, one-time editor of *The Courier* (a London evening paper) and latterly the Paris correspondent of *The Globe*, contrasted the status of journalism in France with its reputation in England, arguing that:

> It is not very usual to find any one who will avow his connexion with a newspaper, and if it were avowed, it would certainly operate to the disadvantage of the party so avowing ... In France on the contrary, to be a journalist, is to be a person of note; to be an editor, is to be a person of accredited power; the title of a journalist, implies education, character, and perhaps disinterested enthusiasm; at any rate, in public opinion, a union of respectable qualities.[7]

The so-called penny-a-line men, on whom the English newspapers relied, lacked the education of 'decent butlers'.[8] The aggressive political affiliation of

[5] E.S. Dallas, 'Popular literature – the periodical press', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 85 (January 1859), 96–112, and (February 1859), 180–95; J.F. Stephen, 'Journalism', *Cornhill Magazine*, 6 (July 1862), 52–63.

[6] In this, I build on Paul Keen's 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' in this volume (Ch. 14), which focuses on periodical writing of the eighteenth century.

[7] G. Merle, 'Journalism', *Westminster Review*, 18 (January 1833), 195. *The Oxford English Dictionary* credits this article with the first use of the word in English.

[8] Merle, 'Journalism', 199.

most newspapers, the poor quality of the writing, and the fact that they were driven by commercial interests and swollen with advertisements contributed to their low reputation.

Snobbery towards newspaper writers persisted until the second half of the century, while 'periodical writing', undertaken for the quarterly reviews and monthly magazines, was regarded as eminently respectable.[9] In *The Economy of Literary Form*, Lee Erickson identifies an 'intellectual hierarchy of written formats' – books, magazines, newspapers – which, he suggests, emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[10] He argues that the essay was the dominant literary form in the 1830s and 1840s, the periodical its dominant publishing format. He points to the sharp decline in the publication of volumes of poetry in those decades and a corresponding growth of new periodical titles. Publishers responded to a reading public prepared to purchase moderately priced periodicals with a variety of content rather than more expensive books.[11]

The rate of pay was a key consideration for most writers when assessing the literary marketplace and weighing up which editor or publication to approach. G.H. Lewes emphasised the attraction of serial publication in an article titled 'The Condition of Authors in England, Germany and France' in *Fraser's Magazine* for March 1847. Pointing out that English authors earned far more than their counterparts on the continent, he attributed this to 'the excellence and abundance of periodical literature'; 'It is by our reviews, magazines and journals, that the vast majority of professional authors earn their bread', he insisted.[12] Anticipating the response that the 'essay-like and fragmentary nature' of articles meant that they were not regarded with the same seriousness as books, Lewes countered that 'a brilliant essay, or a thoughtful fragment, is not the less brilliant, is not the less thoughtful, because it is brief, because it does not exhaust the subject'.[13] In identifying 'journals' along with reviews and magazines, Lewes implied that newspapers as well as reviews and magazines were a potential source of income for writers. His main point was that literature had become a profession, a means of subsistence 'almost as certain as the bar or the church'.[14] Walter Besant, in

[9] See Lee, *Origins of the Popular Press in England*, pp. 116–17.
[10] L. Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800–1850* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 13.
[11] Ibid., pp. 27–8.
[12] G.H. Lewes, 'The condition of authors in England, Germany and France', *Fraser's Magazine*, 35 (March 1847), 288.
[13] Ibid., 289. [14] Ibid., 285.

The Pen and the Book (1899), a handbook for authors, made the same point; namely, that journalism had become not only a viable but a secure profession. As he explained, 'the beginner in the life of letters now attempts to scale the fort by means of journalism'.[15]

Capturing the mood of the times in an article on 'Journalism' in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1862, James Fitzjames Stephen distinguished between the two parts of a newspaper: the news and what he termed 'original matter'.[16] The latter could be subdivided into leading articles on politics and current affairs, and reviews. 'Leaders', as they were generally known, were a precursor of the modern editorial, providing commentary on the news, rather than reportage. By the mid-1850s, they had become the principal genre of newspaper journalism, responsible for the authoritative 'voice' of the Victorian press.[17] Leaders, according to Stephen, formed the greater part of the reading of the educated classes, primarily because they provided a useful digest of the informed opinion of the day. The best leading articles were 'nothing more than samples of the conversation of educated men upon passing events, methodised and thrown into a sustained and literary shape'. They were the 'intellectual mincemeat' upon which the 'busy classes' depended.[18]

Greg made a similar if ironic point about the role of the mid-century newspaper. It not only supplied the nation with news, but its leaders supplied ready-made opinions: 'It furnishes not only the materials on which our conclusions must be founded: it furnishes the conclusions themselves, cut and dried – coined, stamped, and polished. It inquires, reflects, decides for us. For five pence or a penny (as the case may be) it *does all the thinking* of the nation.'[19] Leader writing made a significant contribution to the development of the essay in the nineteenth century, but it was a specialist genre. Stephen estimated that leader writers in the country's most influential newspapers numbered no more than a hundred in 1862. They included graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, civil servants, churchmen, ambitious young barristers with time to spare, and a few writers who sought to increase their income.

Leaders were published anonymously, which was their attraction for those who sought to protect their reputations in other fields; however, as many acknowledged, their authorship was often an open secret. On the other hand, because of their prescribed length and their political focus they did not attract

[15] W. Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), p. 23.
[16] Stephen, 'Journalism', 52.
[17] See D. Liddle, 'Who invented the "leading article"? Reconstructing the history and prehistory of a Victorian newspaper genre', *Media History*, 5:1 (1999), 5–18.
[18] Stephen, 'Journalism', 53.
[19] Greg, 'The newspaper press', 477.

writers who valued the freedom and discursiveness associated with essay writing. Stephen made this point wittily when he stressed that if the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville were to write a leader in *The Times* on the American Civil War, he could give his opinion about the respective prospects of the North and South, but could not 'impress upon the public at large his philosophical theories about the strong and weak points of democratic institutions'.[20] Leaders, in other words, did not provide space for such extended reflection or for digression.

Writing a quarter of a century later, Henry Fox Bourne, a former newspaper man turned press historian, reflected that although leader writing remained the 'highest grade of newspaper work', and its practitioners an elite corps, leaders were more likely to follow public opinion than to shape it. Newspaper readers had become more sophisticated, more attuned to the editorial and other pressures under which leaders were written, so that the result was 'more flash than fire'.[21]

The weekly papers placed special emphasis on the number and quality of their leading articles. Many weeklies combined literary content with news and political analysis, which made them attractive to literary writers. *The Examiner*, founded by John and Leigh Hunt in 1808 and named after Swift's periodical, drew William Hazlitt and John Stuart Mill, and later William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles Dickens, into its orbit because of its liberal politics. *The Spectator*, a leading journal of opinion established in 1828, devoted four of its twenty-four pages to leaders, and five to literature and the arts. *The Leader*, a radical weekly founded in 1850 by Leigh Hunt's son Thornton and the journalist G.H. Lewes, ran for ten years. Hunt was responsible for the political content of the paper, while Lewes oversaw the literary pages. Leaders were also a distinguishing feature of *The Saturday Review*, established in 1855 and known for its pugnacious style and conservative politics. Its leaders were printed in large type to signal their importance.[22]

Some newspapers also contained 'middles', shorter versions of the leader, which focused on political, social, and moral issues. *The Saturday Review*'s middle articles increased in number and in liveliness in the 1860s. The subjects included events of the week; popularisations of science, art, and

[20] Stephen, 'Journalism', 58. He was alluding to de Tocqueville's famous two-part study, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840).

[21] H.R. Fox Bourne, *English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1887), vol. 2., p. 388.

[22] See M.M. Bevington, *The Saturday Review, 1855–1868: Representative Educated Opinion in Victorian England* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 13.

music; quarrels with *The Times*; theatre, law reform, criminal trials; and scholarly essays on history and philology.[23] The emergence of the 'special correspondent', who reported on wars and other disasters at home and abroad, often at considerable personal risk, introduced another essay-like genre into news reporting. In his 1862 *Cornhill* article, Stephen, ranking special correspondents lower than leader writers, was critical of their flamboyant style. But scepticism about the correspondents, or 'specials' as they were popularly known, faded with the rise to prominence of figures like G.A. Sala and Archibald Forbes, whose columns attracted new readers to the newspapers.[24] The other genre relevant to the development of the essay in nineteenth-century newspapers was the review. *The Times* was the first newspaper to institute a reviews section, which it expanded as the century progressed. Other daily papers followed suit.

All of these newspaper genres – leaders, middles, correspondence columns, and reviews – offered scope for essayists, but with clearly defined parameters in terms of subject matter and length. In addition, articles, sketches, and longer essays featured in daily and weekly newspapers from the 1820s to the end of the century. In *The Dynamics of Genre*, Dallas Liddle argues that the unique demands of journalism – writing at short notice, at speed, and to deadlines – meant that writers conformed to genre conventions imposed by newspapers and periodicals, intuitively adapting their style to suit the publication, rather than imposing their own style on the newspaper, review, or magazine.[25] The result, he suggests, was that newspapers and periodicals no longer required the creativity and wide reading of literary writers, and therefore attracted less qualified or mediocre contributors who found it easier to conform to prevailing expectations. Yet there were some journalists whose literary skill and distinctive voices stood out, briefly transforming the quality of newspaper writing in this period.

John Stuart Mill and the Spirit of the Age

John Stuart Mill's autobiographical reflection that writing for the press could not be recommended to anyone who sought to make his name in literature,

[23] Ibid., p. 24.

[24] See C. Waters, *Special Correspondence and the Newspaper Press in Victorian Print Culture, 1850–1886* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[25] See D. Liddle, *The Dynamics of Genre: Journalism and the Practice of Literature in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), pp. 1–45.

'because the writings by which one can live, are not the writings which themselves live and are never those in which the writer does his best', belied the fact that at various periods in his life Mill was an assiduous contributor to the newspapers of the day.[26] His first newspaper article appeared in 1822 when he was sixteen, his last in 1873, the year of his death. His view of the quality of newspapers did not alter appreciably, but he soon learned of their usefulness. As Ann P. Robson, his modern editor argues, in his early years 'the world was Mill's laboratory and the newspapers his daily note-book'.[27] Over time, the newspaper became 'a means of putting his solutions for immediate problems before the public and of educating that public on the broader philosophical and political issues . . . of the day'.[28]

Mill distinguished between the quarterly and monthly reviews, notably *The Westminster Review*, in which he published some of his major essays, and newspapers like the Whig-affiliated, reformist *Morning Chronicle* and *The Examiner*, whose political position served his more immediate purpose. He shared his father James Mill's view of the limitations of periodical literature. Writing in *The Monthly Repository* in April 1833, he echoed the elder Mill's sentiments on its ephemerality:

> Writing of a very high order is thrown away when it is buried in periodicals, which are mostly read but once, and that hastily: yet the only access now to the general public, is through periodicals. An article in a newspaper or a magazine, is to the public mind no more than a drop of water on a stone; and like that, it produces its effect by *repetition*.[29]

Like many of his contemporaries, Mill collected his long review essays into a more permanent volume format, whereas almost none of his extensive newspaper writings were reprinted during his lifetime.

The radical political stance of the weekly *Examiner* under the editorship of Albany Fonblanque between 1830 and 1847 proved particularly attractive to Mill in the 1830s, the first of two periods of intense newspaper writing. From mid-1830 through to 1834, he published more than 200 leaders in *The*

[26] J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* in J.M. Robson, et al. (eds.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91), vol. 1, p. 85. For more on Mill's periodical writing, see the section on 'The utilitarian spirit of the age' in B. Schultz's 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian essay' in this volume (Ch. 27).

[27] A.P. Robson, Introduction to Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. xxvii.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, p. 372. James Mill argued that 'A periodical production must be read the next day, or month, or quarter, otherwise it will not be read at all'; 'Periodical literature 1', *Westminster Review*, 1 (January 1824), 207.

Examiner, most of them on France.[30] This was nearly half of his estimated 450 newspaper articles in total. Many were signed by the initial 'M', others with an 'S' or 'R'. But due to the anonymity and irregularity of his contributions, as Ann and J.M. Robson point out, few if any contemporary readers had a sense of the totality of Mill's newspaper writing.[31]

Mill himself was largely dismissive of his newspaper work, apart from a series of seven essays published in *The Examiner* between January and May 1831, under the heading 'The Spirit of the Age', a title that he was thought to have borrowed from Hazlitt.[32] In these, he attempted, as he later recalled in his *Autobiography*, 'to point out in the character of the present age, the anomalies and evils characteristic of the transition from a system of opinions which had worn out, to another only in process of being formed'.[33] His agenda in the leaders was to warn against the possibility of the kind of revolution that had happened in France. The second essay of the series, published on 23 January 1831, began characteristically:

> I have said that the present age is an age of transition: I shall now attempt to point out one of the most important consequences of this fact. In all other conditions of mankind, the uninstructed have faith in the instructed. In an age of transition, the divisions among the instructed nullify their authority, and the uninstructed lose their faith in them. The multitude are without a guide; and society is exposed to all the errors and dangers which are to be expected when persons who have never studied any branch of knowledge comprehensively and as a whole attempt to judge for themselves upon particular parts of it.

He drew an analogy with a party of travellers in an unknown country being led by a blind guide, who are persuaded that each must dare to think and see for himself, even if it meant acquiring a pair of spectacles: 'The men of the past are those who continue to insist upon our still adhering to the blind guide. The men of the present are those who bid each man look about for himself, with or without the promise of spectacles to assist him.'[34] The style is that of the mature Mill, rational, logical, with his emotions rarely surfacing. Yet these essays were, according to him, 'lumbering in style, and not lively or

[30] See A.P. and J.M. Robson, '"Impetuous eagerness": the young Mill's radical journalism' in J. Shattock and M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 60, n. 9; 74, n. 30.
[31] Ibid., p. 62, n. 9.
[32] Hazlitt's collection of character sketches with that title was published in 1825.
[33] Mill, *Autobiography* in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 181.
[34] J.S. Mill, 'The spirit of the age, No. 2' in *Collected Works*, vol. 22, pp. 238–9.

striking enough to be at any time acceptable to newspaper readers'.[35] Whatever his misgivings, 'The Spirit of the Age' essays, written in the period leading to the passing of the Great Reform Bill of 1832, and reflecting a genuine sense of urgency, are the most referenced of his newspaper articles written over a period of fifty years.

The Uncommercial Traveller: Charles Dickens

Journalism also played a formative role in the career of Charles Dickens, who acknowledged as much in a speech to the Newspaper Press Fund in May 1865, extolling 'this wonderful ubiquitous newspaper' and saluting his 'brothers', the parliamentary reporters.[36] Recalling his time as a reporter for *The Morning Chronicle*, Dickens paid tribute to John Black, its legendary editor, but curiously did not allude to the far more significant role the *Chronicle* had played in publishing his sketches of urban life. When collected in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), these essays launched his career as a writer of fiction.[37] To Dickens, the demands of daily publication were not as attractive as the rhythm of monthly parts, which became the norm for his full-length novels. In a comment at the end of the preface to the first edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* in October 1839, he refers to himself as 'the periodical essayist, the Author of these pages'.[38] John Drew suggests that he was acknowledging that the spontaneous and reciprocal relationship created by serial publication took precedence over his satisfaction as 'the Author' of a now completed and more permanent novel.[39] That interactive relationship proved important in his journalism as well as in his fiction.

Dickens's skills as a leader writer and essayist were honed during his period writing for *The Examiner*, an association that began in 1837 and accelerated when his friend John Forster took over the editorship of the newspaper in 1847. Initially Dickens contributed theatre and book reviews, but he soon branched out with idiosyncratic essays, often containing coded political or social messages, which were a sign of things to come. 'Snoring for

[35] Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 181.
[36] C. Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K.J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 344, 346.
[37] See C. Dickens, *Dickens's Journalism*, ed. M. Slater and J. Drew, 4 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1994–2000), vol. 4, pp. 436–46, for a complete list of Dickens's journalism from 1833 to 1869.
[38] C. Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1839), p. ii.
[39] J. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 48.

the Million', which appeared in *The Examiner* on 24 December 1842, was an ironic spoof on the practice of 'Singing for the Million' which had been espoused as a panacea for the nation's ills by the evangelicals of Exeter Hall, one of Dickens's favourite bêtes noires. In 'Snoring for the Million', he proposed the adoption of mass hypnosis to put various sections of society to sleep:

> But it is, in its effects upon the lower classes; upon the million; the labourers and the artizans; the vulgar men of toil and sweat, and want and rags; that this system has peculiar claims upon the present Administration. No more complaints of hunger, when the starving poor may sleep and dream of loaves at will! No more pinching of the Landed Interest's corn in its good old gouty shoe! The ravelled sleeve of Care which flutters in the murky streets of our manufacturing towns, shadowing strange shapes in its dreary gambols, will be sewn up by the quickest process in the world . . . all will be peace and comfort: there will be forgetfulness for those who have nothing, and undisturbed enjoyment for those who have everything.[40]

Whether or not readers recognised his literary allusions, they would have found it hard to miss the irony operating in the mode of satire.[41] Dickens would further develop his talent as an essayist in his most important journalistic venture, his own weekly magazines, but in the interim, in 1846, he became editor of *The Daily News*, a new morning paper launched by his publishers Bradbury and Evans. He soon realised he was unsuited to the pressures of managing a daily newspaper. The one legacy from that brief period was a series of 'Travelling Letters', or essays, derived from his correspondence during the family's travels in Italy in 1844–5, which were augmented and republished as *Pictures from Italy* (1846).[42]

Of the various daily and weekly papers established at mid-century, the most significant for the history of the essay were undoubtedly Dickens's *Household Words* (1850–9) and its successor, *All the Year Round* (1859–95). *Household Words* was launched with a flourish on 30 March 1850, with Dickens writing a 'Preliminary Word' to his readers and styling himself the weekly's 'conductor', in contrast to the more usual title of editor. The magazine was accompanied by a 'Household Narrative of Current Events',

[40] C. Dickens, 'Snoring for the million' in Slater and Drew (eds.), *Dickens's Journalism*, vol. 2, p. 55.

[41] For more on irony and satire in the essay, see J. Strachan's 'Satire and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 16).

[42] The 'Travelling letters' were published from 21 January to 11 March 1846. Dickens's editorship lasted from 21 January to 9 February.

which led to a test case in the Court of Exchequer to determine whether it was a newspaper and therefore liable for a stamp duty, rather than, as Dickens intended, a family-oriented miscellany. The eventual judgment in 1851 was that the 'Narrative' was a chronicle or pamphlet, so *Household Words* remained unstamped. In its nine-year run, and more significantly, in that of *All the Year Round* during his lifetime, Dickens produced some of the most imaginative and distinctive essays of the second half of the nineteenth century.

His initial contributions to *Household Words* were forceful leaders on social issues, examples of good investigative journalism. As was the prevailing practice, the essays were unsigned, although Dickens's style became recognisable to regular readers. His 'A Monument of French Folly' (8 March 1851) supported the campaign to remove Smithfield Market and its abattoir to an area outside central London. In 'Trading in Death' (27 November 1852) he attacked the current fashion for ostentatious funerals. Other essays were written as first-person narratives, the speaker engaging directly with a representative of the trade or activity under scrutiny. In 'Betting Shops' (26 June 1852) he attacked unscrupulous dealers. In 'Bill Sticking' (22 March 1851) he called out those who defaced London's walls and buildings with large advertisements. In 'Gone Astray' (13 August 1853), one of the first essays to prompt an autobiographical reading, he adopted a more intimate tone as he recalled being lost in London as a child, observing landmarks and street life until he was rescued.

In the introduction to the fourth volume of the Dent Uniform Edition of *Dickens's Journalism*, Michael Slater and John Drew draw attention to Dickens's familiarity with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *Spectator*, with Henry Mackenzie's *Lounger*, and with Charles Lamb's Elia, all of which influenced the style of his essays.[43] The voice that had been ironic and at times savage in its criticism of society in the leaders and essays in *The Examiner* (and, initially, in *Household Words*) became more personal, measured, and reflective in *All the Year Round*. The latter style was that of the familiar essay, rather than of investigative journalism. There, London remained the focus, this time observed through the eyes of the 'Uncommercial Traveller' in his walks through the capital. In an essay on Dickens of 1858, Walter Bagehot observed presciently: 'Mr Dickens's genius is especially suited to the delineation of City life. London is like a newspaper.

[43] M. Slater and J. Drew, Introduction to *Dickens's Journalism*, ed. Slater and Drew, vol. 4, p. xvi. See also Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, p. 152.

Everything is there and everything is disconnected ... He has too, the peculiar alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.'[44]

In three series of essays written under the collective title 'The Uncommercial Traveller', Dickens adopted the pose not so much of the special correspondent as of the urban traveller or explorer, voyaging into the unknown territory of London's East End.[45] Drew notes elements of contemporary travel writing, the popular *récit de voyages*, in essays like 'Night Walks' and 'Wapping Workhouse', both published in 1860.[46] In the former, drawing on Dickens's own nocturnal walks through London, the persona of the Uncommercial Traveller encounters 'Homelessness', a creature whose ragged clothes come away in his hands as he attempts to reach out to him. In 'A Small Star in the East' (1868), the same Dickensian persona visits a hospital for sick children in the East End, run by a young doctor and his wife and funded by charitable donations. In 'Wapping Workhouse', he adopts the pose of a flâneur, or observant traveller, who in this instance is shown round a hostel for vagrant women.

The opening of 'Wapping Workhouse' is characteristic of 'the uncommercial's' eye for detail:

> My day's no-business beckoning me to the East end of London, I had turned my face to that point of the metropolitan compass on leaving Covent Garden and had got past the India House, thinking in my idle manner of Tippoo-Sahib and Charles Lamb, and had got past my little wooden midshipman, after affectionately patting him on one leg of his knee-shorts for old acquaintance' sake, and had got past Aldgate Pump, and had got past the Saracen's Head (with an ignominious rash of posting-bills disfiguring his swarthy countenance), and had strolled up the empty yard of his ancient neighbour the Black or Blue Boar, or Bull, who departed this life I don't know when, and whose coaches are all gone I don't know where; and I had come out again into the age of railways, and I had got past Whitechapel Church, and was – rather inappropriately for an Uncommercial Traveller – in the Commercial Road.[47]

[44] W. Bagehot, 'Charles Dickens' in *Literary Studies*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), vol. 2, p. 197.

[45] For more on Dickens as a Victorian travel essayist, see B. Schaff's 'A brief history of travel and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 30).

[46] See J. Drew, 'Voyages extraordinaires: Dickens's "Travelling Essays" and "The Uncommercial Traveller" (Part 2)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 13:3 (September 1996), 127–50.

[47] C. Dickens, *All the Year Round* (18 February 1860), in Slater and Drew (eds.), *Dickens's Journalism*, vol. 4, p. 43.

Michael Slater argues that the more personal element in the 'Uncommercial Traveller' essays was a deliberate strategy on Dickens's part to create a sense of intimacy. The relationship with his readers that the author of *Nicholas Nickleby* hoped to have achieved was just as important to the essayist in *All the Year Round* some twenty years later. Although they were written over the course of more than three decades, and for different publications, Dickens's essays have a thematic coherence and a textual richness that links them to his fiction. His journalism was not a preliminary stage in his development or a means to an end, as could be said of Mill's newspaper writing. It was central to his writing life.

George Eliot's Journalism

Whereas women writers found it comparatively easy to write for the increasing number of reviews and magazines that sprang up as the century progressed, they made few inroads into newspaper writing until the end of the century. One reason, as Arnold Bennett observed in his *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (1898), was that they found the masculine atmosphere of the newspaper office intimidating and off-putting. Another was the sheer physical demands that newspaper work put on the writer. Emily Crawford, the doyenne of female foreign correspondents, warned of this in her article on 'Journalism as a Profession for Women' in 1893.[48] The introduction of a reviews section in some newspapers offered women a less arduous route into journalism.

Provincial newspapers were more accessible than their London counterparts, as Marian Evans (later George Eliot) discovered. Her first foray into journalism was in 1846 as a writer for *The Coventry Herald and Observer*, owned by her friend Charles Bray. Her work for the paper put her in touch with a wider intellectual circle that included James Anthony Froude, whose book *The Nemesis of Faith* she reviewed, and John Chapman, later the proprietor of *The Westminster Review*, who made her the de facto editor of the quarterly.[49] In her reviews for *The Coventry Herald*, there are early

[48] E. Crawford, 'Journalism as a profession for women', *Contemporary Review* (September 1893), 362–71. Crawford covered the Paris Commune of 1871 for *The Daily News*. On the professionalisation of the essayist a century earlier, see P. Keen's 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' in this volume (Ch. 14).

[49] See F. Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

indications of the style of her more substantial essays in the *Westminster*.[50] Her prose sketches, 'Poetry and Prose from the Notebook of an Eccentric' (1846–7), were early attempts at moral essays, a subgenre to which she would return in her last published work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879).

Her distinctive style was most apparent in her review essays for the weekly *Leader*, to which she contributed from 1851. Like her later essays in *The Westminster Review*, they were the work of a novelist in the making.[51] In a review of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1855), she conveyed her central ideas about realism, imagination, and sympathy, ideas echoed in the better-known essay 'The Natural History of German Life', published in the *Westminster* the following year:

> Surely the sphere of art extends wherever there is beauty either in form, or thought, or feeling. A ray of sunlight falling on the dreariest sandbank will often serve the painter for a fine picture; the tragedian may take for his subject the most hideous passions if they serve as the background for some divine deed of tenderness or heroism, and so the novelist may place before us every aspect of human life where there is some twist of love, or endurance, or helplessness to call forth our best sympathies.[52]

In her essay 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft' (1855), as critics have pointed out, she anticipated the relationship of Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* (1871–2):

> Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an 'establishment' may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine. No matter. Anything is more endurable than to change our established formulae about women, or to run the risk of looking up to our wives instead of looking down on them.[53]

[50] See G. Eliot [M. Evans], *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A.S. Byatt and N. Warren (London: Penguin, 1990).

[51] For a different interpretation of the relationship of Evans's journalism to her fiction, see Liddle, *Dynamics of Genre*, ch. 4.

[52] [M. Evans], 'The morality of Wilhelm Meister', *Leader* (21 July 1855), reprinted in Eliot, *Selected Essays*, ed. Byatt and Warren, p. 309.

[53] [M. Evans], 'Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft', *Leader* (13 October 1855), reprinted in Eliot, *Selected Essays*, ed. Byatt and Warren, pp. 336–7.

This is the narrative voice that would become familiar to readers of *Middlemarch*, just as the essay on *Wilhelm Meister* anticipates the famous seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede*, 'In which the Story Pauses a Little', where the novelist expanded her ideas about realism in fiction.

Marian Evans's decision in 1857 to abandon essay and review writing in order to concentrate on her fiction ironically flew in the face of her partner Lewes's insistence that periodical writing enabled the modern writer to become a professional. The positive reception of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), followed by the runaway success of *Adam Bede* (1859), gave her the financial security to stick to her resolution.[54] Yet as the *Leader* articles demonstrate, the distinctive narrative voice that characterises her novels, her focus on ordinary lives and emotions and her doctrine of sympathy, first emerged in her journalism. Marian Evans the reviewer is recognisable in George Eliot.

Conclusion

In an article on 'Journalists' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1878, Alexander Innes Shand declared that 'long-winded' articles were going out of date. The traditional format of the quarterlies and monthlies, he argued, did not suit daily newspapers, which required concise notices of recent publications similar to the 'notes on the trade in hides or tallow'.[55] Shand was chronicling the decline of the genre of which he was a consummate practitioner, the expansive 'review-like essay and essay-like review', as Walter Bagehot described it, and the emergence of a new, shorter, and, to his mind, more casual substitute.[56] More significantly, he was heralding the acceptance of the newspaper as the preferred outlet for reviews. His point was borne out by handbooks for journalists of the 1880s and 1890s, which advised that the 'laboured critical literary essay' would not attract potential editors; that, in the words of one experienced writer, 'Its day has gone.'[57]

[54] In 1865, Evans wrote four articles for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, for which Lewes was an adviser: 'A word for the Germans' (7 March), 'Servants' logic' (17 March), 'Futile falsehoods' (3 April), and 'Modern housekeeping' (13 May).

[55] A.I. Shand, 'Contemporary literature 1. Journalists', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 124 (December 1878), 661.

[56] Bagehot, 'The first Edinburgh reviewers', *Literary Studies*, vol. 1, p. 5. For more on this phenomenon, see E. Tippin's 'The short essay in context, 1870–1920' in this volume (Ch. 33).

[57] Besant, *Pen and the Book*, p. 252.

By the end of the century, many of the long-lived quarterlies and magazines had ceased publication. In response, newspapers expanded to fill the gap by creating various new departments including literary pages, supplements, and special features. With this transformation, the old distinction between newspaper writer and periodical essayist gave way to the more inclusive term 'journalist'. The traditional 'review-like essay', with its extensive quotations had disappeared, as Shand predicted, but it was replaced, not only by briefer notices of books, but also by a new literary journalism that, like political journalism, embraced the essay for its flexibility. Bylines were gradually introduced from the early decades of the twentieth century. Concise or expansive, impersonal or subjective, the essay became an adaptable genre in the modern journalist's portfolio.

26

The Essay in the Age of Chartism

GREGORY VARGO

How does an essay change when it appears in a newspaper? How does its meaning shift if that newspaper is embedded in a political movement and reports on and propagandises for a popular campaign? Recent decades have seen a wealth of scholarship about the literary culture of radical politics in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, showing how writers affiliated with the agitation for democratic reforms known as Chartism utilised and transformed genres such as the Romantic ballad, stage melodrama, and popular fiction. Yet critics have given far less attention to radical essays. In fact, political campaigning is often seen as opposed to the contemplative and reflective values associated with the essay.

But essays were an important part of radical discourse throughout the nineteenth century, as they were for earlier generations of participants in popular struggles inspired by Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Cobbett, and many others.[1] Seeking universal male suffrage as its central demand, the Chartist movement created over a hundred newspapers and journals while nourishing a diverse literature, which in turn profoundly impacted the wider literature and journalism of the 1830s and 1840s.[2]

[1] This lack of attention to radical essayism in the Victorian era is especially striking given the many excellent studies of earlier radical essayists. See, e.g., K. Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); L. Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and O. Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

[2] Relevant studies include R. Breton, *The Penny Politics of Victorian Popular Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021); I. Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); S. Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); C.V. Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832–1867* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and G. Vargo, *An Underground History of Early Victorian Fiction: Chartism, Radical Print Culture, and the Social Problem Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

This chapter will show how this influence extended to political essays in the age of Chartism.

Radical Journalism and its Discontents

Testifying to the importance of essays within Chartism, some of the most visible controversies in the movement were sparked by essayists. In a book-length essay titled *Chartism: A New Organization of the People* (1841), the long-time political activists William Lovett and John Collins denigrated mass protests in favour of communal study and mutual self-improvement. Following the tract's publication, Lovett and his fellow moderates broke with the more militant wing of the Chartist campaign, precipitating an internal crisis. In a series of lectures eventually collected as a sermon, the Chartist poet John Watkins denounced Lovett for his apostasy: 'shall traitors to the people – the worst of traitors – be tenderly dealt with – nay, courted, caressed? No, ... let us prevent their future treasons and make examples of them to deter future traitors ... We are in a warfare and must have martial law – *short shrift, and sharp cord.*'[3] Lovett and Collins's *Chartism* thus stands as perhaps the only instance in British literary history of an essay provoking a call for the assassination of its author.

Lovett and Collins composed their tract in Warwick Gaol, a circumstance they credit with motivating its composition: 'Being in a prison, we have found some difficulty in proceeding as far as we have ... but, in all probability, if we were in the enjoyment of that inestimable blessing [liberty], the pressing demands of our families, and the active pursuits of life, would have ... prevented us from ever writing anything on the subject.'[4] By highlighting the material and intellectual deprivations of confinement, the authors underline an important attribute of radical writing, namely the way it is, in Kevin Gilmartin's description, 'scarred and limited by the repressive conditions under which it was produced'.[5] Gilmartin argues that governmental surveillance, the threat of prosecution, and the stifling stamp acts that made periodicals inaccessible to working-class readers combined to produce in post-Napoleonic radical journalism 'a form in crisis', as repression repeatedly disrupted the radical weeklies.[6]

[3] Quoted in W. Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett, in his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom* (London: Trübner, 1876), p. 251.
[4] W. Lovett and J. Collins, *Chartism, A New Organization of the People* (1841; New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 110.
[5] Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 80. [6] Ibid., pp. 80–1.

Some fifteen years later, *The Poor Man's Guardian* made the harassment that the paper confronted a constant theme over its four-year run (1831–5). An article in January 1833, for example, reported that the *Guardian*'s publisher and printer Henry Hetherington 'was apprehended on his way from Birmingham to Coventry, and is now . . . "in the keeping of that only 'Poor Man's Guardian' which the modern system of law recognises – THE GAOLER"'.[7] The *Guardian* used the circumstances under which unstamped papers were produced to exemplify the corrupt social order: 'Poor men of England! – there is no law for you in this country – no law, we mean, for your protection. There are plenty of laws to plunder you, to pauperise you, to overwork you, to starve you, to whip you, to transport you, to hang you; but – we repeat it emphatically – there is no law for your protection.'[8] Even after the reduction of the stamp duty to 1d. in 1836, the stamp acts continued to assert pressure on the radical press.[9] *The Star* apologised for its acquiescence to the tax: 'that little red spot in the corner of my newspaper. That is the stamp; the Whig "beauty" spot; your "plague" spot'. By contrast, *The Democratic Review* folded in 1850 when its editor, George Julian Harney, was threatened with prosecution for failure to pay the newspaper tax.[10]

Beyond the brute facts of prosecutions and closures, the stamp acts shaped the form of writing in the radical press in ways that influenced the wider history of the essay. First, because journals that omitted news were exempt from the stamp tax, the law encouraged the publication of commentary in the place of reportage, thus ironically incubating a genre of polemical prose. Gilmartin sums up the implications of this process: 'The legal dialectic of repression and evasion tended to blur formal categories, and open them up to political manipulation and dispute.'[11] Second, journals exploiting the grey area between news and commentary found it useful to reprint articles and extracts from previously published pieces, a practice initiated in the first unstamped paper, William Cobbett's second *Political Register* of 1816, which took material from the longer and more expensive version of the same

[7] B. O'Brien, 'Persecution and imprisonment of Mr Hetherington', *Poor Man's Guardian* (12 January 1833), 9.

[8] Ibid.

[9] For an account of the influence of the eventual repeal of the 'taxes on knowledge' upon the essay, see J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' in this volume (Ch. 25).

[10] J. Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 61; D. Black, *Helen Macfarlane: A Feminist, Revolutionary Journalist, and Philosopher in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 111.

[11] Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 78.

journal. If Thomas Carlyle complained about his own decision 'to slit [*Sartor Resartus*] up into stripes, and send it forth in the Periodical way' when he published it serially in *Fraser's Magazine*, such textual violence was multiplied manifold in down-market publications for working-class readers, where essays fragmented further into extraordinarily different formats.[12] An essay might appear in one to three columns over several weeks, only to be excerpted by diverse other periodicals, some of which might take a significant portion of the original text while others selected a few choice paragraphs or even stray sentences. The experience of fragmentation was compounded by the miscellaneous content readers encountered.[13]

If the intertextual nature of periodicals worked to disperse attention, however, certain editorial experiments countered this phenomenon, as editors juxtaposed essays in order to produce an argumentative effect. The Chartist poet and engraver W.J. Linton's *National*, for instance, featured one or two dominant themes in each weekly issue.[14] Two numbers in the middle of the magazine's six-month run (January–June 1839) focused on feminist topics, an unusual emphasis in the Chartist press. The first issue begins with Percy Bysshe Shelley on 'Marriage, Celibacy, and Prostitution' (taken from a footnote to *Queen Mab*); the reader next discovers the atheist Shelley's views surprisingly echoed in 'Milton on Divorce', which in turn selects passages from the second and sixth chapters of Milton's *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*.[15] Linton continues the sequence with 'The Seraglio', a short essay that likens British and Eastern patriarchy.[16] A second essay by Linton takes up the social and political rights of women more broadly.[17] Finally, a severely truncated version of William Godwin's 'Life of Mary Wollstonecraft' provides readers with an example of female achievement, before an essay by Robert Owen on education rounds out the packed sixteen-page issue.[18]

Yet Linton's tight focus on specific themes was far from typical. Most Chartist journals – like many contemporary papers – addressed a huge array

[12] Thomas Carlyle to James Fraser, 27 May 1833, quoted in T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. K. McSweeney and P. Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 227.
[13] L. Brake, *Print in Transition: Studies in Media and Book History* (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 50.
[14] F.B. Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton, 1812–97* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), p. 20.
[15] P.B. Shelley, 'Marriage, celibacy and prostitution' and J. Milton, 'Milton on divorce', both in *The National* (9 March 1839), 132–3 and 133–4, respectively.
[16] W.J. Linton, 'The seraglio', *The National* (9 March 1839), 134.
[17] W.J. Linton, 'The right of woman', *The National* (9 March 1839), 135–9.
[18] W. Godwin, 'Life of Mary Wollstonecraft', *The National* (9 March 1839), 139–40.

of subject matter in every number. Surrounding content might thus complicate an essay, so that the theme of a particular essay would be broadened or qualified depending on nearby articles. An interesting example of this phenomenon occurs in *The People's Journal* (1846–8), a reform-minded weekly aimed at readers from the lower-middle class and the upper tranches of the working classes. Where the *Journal*'s expository pieces characteristically espoused a hopeful optimism for gradual amelioration in the social and economic condition of the working classes, its fiction paints a grimmer picture. In the 20 June 1846 issue, Mary Leman Gillies's short story 'The Mechanic's Wife' offered a different diagnosis of 'the Condition of England' than William Howitt's final instalment in his 'Letters on Labour'. Howitt's 'Letters' laud cooperative endeavours by working people, celebrating temperance societies, mutual study groups, and worker-owned manufacturies.

Immediately following Howitt's essay, Gillies's story supports his praise of cooperation, but it also points out Howitt's major blind spot. Gillies's story features a young married couple in which the husband, although committed to personal improvement through hard work and study, 'had grown up to regard women as the mere machines of domestic life, with neither necessity nor capability for higher things, and which to "spirits masculine" he deemed so essential'.[19] Following a period of isolation, the wife dies, leaving behind a diary that pleads for her husband to recognise women's need for opportunities beyond the domestic sphere. The story thus raises a feminist rationale for cooperative communities by suggesting that more communal living arrangements would provide emotional support for wives and mothers and potentially lead to broader experiments in the sexual division of labour, an idea Gillies's essay 'Associated Homes' (1846) had voiced in an earlier issue of *The People's Journal*.[20] At the same time, 'The Mechanic's Wife' highlights the overwhelmingly masculine nature of the endeavours Howitt chronicles and implies that such activities might perpetuate sexual inequality; after all, Gillies's heroine is victimised by just the kind of self-improving husband Howitt praises.

These instances give some sense of Victorian periodicals' 'dialogic and heteroglossic energy', which for Hilary Fraser embody a democratic ethos by instantiating deliberation and dispute; she depicts a periodical as 'a collection of voices and images that speak to each other within each issue as well as serially and intertextually, their meanings shaped by their relation to other

[19] M.L. Gillies, 'The mechanic's wife', *People's Journal* (20 June 1846), 356–9.
[20] M.L. Gillies, 'Associated homes', *People's Journal* (10 January 1846), 26–7.

periodical texts as well as to the world to which they refer'.[21] If Victorian periodicals modelled 'a dynamic debate in process', the radical press was democratic in the further sense of growing out of and helping to nourish an oppositional culture.[22] As Gilmartin points out, it did this in quite practical ways: 'By discussing strategy, creating popular distribution networks, and announcing and reporting on public meetings, weekly papers embodied and figured forth a plebeian political culture in which readers could actively participate.'[23]

Journals' entanglement with political culture left its imprint on the style of the essay in two important ways. The first was by encouraging an oratorical mode that facilitated reading 'aloud to assembled audiences', a practice common at political meetings and other types of gatherings.[24] Political newspapers commonly reprinted speeches, while other kinds of writing took on aspects of oratory. This style was marked typographically in the busy appearance of Chartist essays, which included 'a range of different type faces and font sizes' and a plethora of 'capitals, italics, [and] parenthesises [*sic*]'.[25] Such typography offered the visual equivalent of the heightened, melodramatic language that defined Chartist speeches and writing. All of this served to distance the radical essay from a tradition of writing that utilised an intimate or 'conversational' tone to address implicitly individuated readers in the privacy of their homes.[26]

The radical press's connection to movement politics furthermore shifted its implied reader along the fault line of class. An early issue of Cobbett's unstamped *Political Register* announced this new addressee in its lead article, 'To the Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland'.[27] Cobbett's class-inflected addressee echoed throughout Chartist journals, which attempted to instil a sense of communal ownership of the

[21] H. Fraser, 'Periodicals and reviewing' in K. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 65.
[22] Ibid. [23] Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 107.
[24] J. Allen and O. Ashton, Introduction to *Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press*, ed. Allen and Ashton (Bodmin, UK: Merlin Press, 2005), p. xiv. See also C. Yelland, 'Speech and writing in the *Northern Star*' in S. Roberts (ed.), *The People's Charter: Democratic Agitation in Victorian Britain* (Bodmin, UK: Merlin Press, 2005), pp. 95–113.
[25] Allen and Ashton, Introduction to *Papers for the People*, p. xiv.
[26] T. Wright, 'Carlyle, Emerson, and the voiced essay' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 208.
[27] W. Cobbett, 'To the journeymen and labourers of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland' in L. Nattrass (ed.), *William Cobbett: Selected Writings*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), vol. 3, pp. 342–64; G. Spater, *William Cobbett, the Poor Man's Friend*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol. 2, p. 347.

press. The masthead of *The People's Charter* proclaimed that it was 'established by the working classes', while the Irish Chartist Feargus O'Connor's published letters in *The Northern Star* addressed 'the Men with Fustian Jackets, Unshorn Chins, and Blistered Hands, their Wives and Children'.[28] Cobbett's essay 'To the Journeymen', like much of his later writing, attempted 'to overturn the assumption that the vulgar have no place in the political nation', an assertion advanced as much by explicit argument as by a 'self-consciously colloquial' style.[29] This style, which had also been used by Thomas Paine, was characterised by frequent exclamations and interjections, rhetorical questions, analogies drawn from everyday life, and a telling mixture of polite and demotic diction; 'let us get on a little with our *broods* of Pensioners' is a characteristic example of the latter effect.[30]

Carlyle and Chartism

The permeable nature of writing in the radical press and its intimate connection with movement politics has led some scholars to exclude it from the canon of the essay. A recent critical anthology entirely omits the corpus of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century radical writing, though this is in no ways atypical.[31] Yet, when examined closely, one might see the ways radical journalism extends crucial tendencies of the essay – hybridity, open-endedness, and 'a fragmentary aesthetics of compilation' – to their logical conclusion.[32] Or, to turn this proposition around, one might recognise how essays remained deeply intertwined with periodical culture, which in the first half of the nineteenth century was in no small part shaped by the radical press and mainstream journalism's responses to it. As a way of suggesting the influence of radical writing on the broader history of the essay, it is helpful to

[28] F. O'Connor, 'To the men with fustian jackets, unshorn chins, and blistered hands, their wives and children', *Northern Star* (16 May 1840), 6.

[29] Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*, pp. 110, 174.

[30] W. Cobbett, 'Fires in Kent and Sussex: to the working people of England' in Nattrass (ed.), *William Cobbett*, vol. 6, p. 23 (emphasis in original). On Paine's informal style, see Smith, *Politics of Language*, pp. 35–67; and Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*.

[31] See Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*. Indeed, the only reference in the collection to radical writing before Orwell is to categorically exclude it. 'Yet, at the same time, Hazlitt and Hunt shared an ambition for their periodical essays to be elevated above the scrap of Radical journalism, typified by William Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register* (1802–35)': O. Field, 'Retiring or engaging: politics in the English essay' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 230.

[32] Karshan and Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 12; see also pp. 2 and 7.

look in detail at what Thomas Carlyle – the most famous Victorian essayist – took from Chartist writers.

Carlyle was the preeminent commentator on the social upheaval of the 1830s and 1840s.[33] In a series of 'richly allusive' essays featuring 'thundering pronouncements of moral indignation', he elevated the conflicts of his time to near mythic significance.[34] Carlyle's body of writing on this period included *Chartism* (1839), *Past and Present* (1843), *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), and, less directly, *The French Revolution* (1837). One of the most well-known motifs running through these works is the inarticulacy of the working class, particularly when engaged in political agitation. In *Chartism*, Carlyle interprets 'the thought which at heart torments these wild inarticulate souls, struggling there, with inarticulate uproar, like dumb creatures in pain, unable to speak what is in them', language that reappears in more apocalyptic form ten years later in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*: 'Everywhere immeasurable Democracy rose monstrous, loud, blatant, inarticulate as the voice of Chaos.'[35]

Critics have pointed out, variously, how this motif allows Carlyle to '[act] as a ventriloquist' for the crowds he reduces to silence, how he aligns inarticulacy with figures from Greek mythology, and how he paradoxically grants historical agency to those he claims have no voice.[36] Less commonly remarked is that Carlyle repeatedly figures social movements as textual, deploying a set of images and metaphors deeply at odds with the previous theme. *Chartism* reminds the reader of the place of writing in the French Revolution by alluding to a founding document of the French Republic (and Thomas Paine's best-selling essay): 'And so the "rights of man" were to be written down on paper; and experimentally wrought upon towards elaboration . . . Rights of man, wrongs of man? It is a question which has

[33] For a further account of Carlyle's essays, see B. Schultz's 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian essay' in this volume (Ch. 27).

[34] J. Ulrich, 'Carlyle's *Chartism* and the politics of the (in)articulate', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45:1 (2012), 71.

[35] T. Carlyle, 'Chartism' in A. Shelston (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 155; T. Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1850), p. 5.

[36] Ulrich, 'Carlyle's *Chartism*', 71, 75; C.V. Bossche, 'Chartism, class discourse, and the captain of industry: social agency in *Past and Present*' in P. Kerry and M. Hill (eds.), *Thomas Carlyle Resartus: Reappraising Carlyle's Contribution to the Philosophy of History, Political Theory, and Cultural Criticism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), pp. 36–7; J. Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 152.

swallowed whole nations and generations.'[37] A few pages later, it is as if the world has become a text; 'events' are likened to 'written lessons, glaring in huge hieroglyphic picture-writing, that all may read and know them'.[38] Similarly, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* begins by recognising the power of the press and platform oratory in the revolutions of 1848: 'The French People had plumed themselves on being . . . at least the chosen "soldiers of liberty" . . . as their orators, editors and litterateurs diligently taught them.'[39]

Such sideways glances towards revolutionary writing and speech should alert us to the possibility of Carlyle's deeper engagement with the thought of the protest campaigns his essays repeatedly invoke. Alongside images of crowds as mythic victims, natural forces, or 'dumb creatures' is grudging engagement with the 'orators, editors and litterateurs' of the radical press. Mark Allison has persuasively demonstrated a number of affinities linking *Past and Present* with Owenite socialism: 'Consider some of the major themes of Carlyle's diagnosis of contemporary British society: the degradation and exploitation of the laboring classes . . . the irrationalities of commerce and mass production . . . and the replacement of the variegated web of traditional communal bonds by the "sole nexus" of "Cash-payment".'[40] Each of these emphases not only characterised the thought of the Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, but also had wide traction throughout 1830s and 1840s radical discourse, which came to share significant features of the Owenite critique of capitalism.[41] Beyond these affinities, motifs scattered throughout Carlyle's essays make clear his familiarity with ideas common in the radical press, even though Carlyle frequently marks his departures from such positions.

In the experimental essay *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4), Carlyle's fictional persona Diogenes Teufelsdröckh is said to possess predilections towards 'Radicalism . . . though his special contributions to the *Isis* could never be more than surmised at'.[42] Here, Carlyle alludes to the ultra-radical Eliza Sharples, who created a sensation in early 1830s London as a young single woman who became a prominent lecturer at Richard Carlile's Rotunda, which promulgated republicanism and 'freethought'; Sharples not only edited the journal *Isis* but lectured in that persona, appearing theatrically as

[37] Carlyle, 'Chartism', pp. 183–4. [38] Ibid., p. 187.
[39] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 4.
[40] M. Allison, 'The mustard seed of British socialism: Carlyle, Robert Owen, and "infallible influence"' in P. Kerry, A. Pionke, and M. Dent (eds.), *Thomas Carlyle and the Idea of Influence* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), pp. 285–6.
[41] G. Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 169–207.
[42] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 12.

a Greek goddess. Although Carlyle's reference is admittedly casual, Teufelsdröckh expresses ideas that would have been at home in the Jacobinical magazine, as his philosophy of clothes repeatedly reflects on the arbitrary nature of social distinctions. The fictional editor of *Sartor Resartus* remarks: 'Much . . . we omit about "Kings wrestling naked on the green with Carmen", and the Kings being thrown: "dissect them with scalpels", says Teufelsdröckh; "the same viscera, tissues, livers, lights, and other Life-tackle are there: examine their spiritual mechanism; the same great Need, great Greed, and little Faculty".'[43] If the editor's framing muddies the implied author's attitude toward Teufelsdröckh's ideas, his nervousness nevertheless underlines the philosopher's explosive politics.

Whereas *Sartor Resartus* engages the republicanism of the early 1830s, *Chartism* takes up the agitation against social austerity imposed by the New Poor Law of 1834, a campaign that became a key ingredient in early Chartism, lending the latter movement its sense of crisis and insurrectionary urgency. Carlyle's tract effectively communicates this intensity. Additionally, Carlyle, like many radical journalists, reads governmental reports and statistics with a healthy dose of scepticism.[44] Although he dissents from the melodramatic rendering of Poor Law administrators common in the radical press, his comments on the law suggest familiarity with the discourse he rejects, which renders Poor Law officials and institutions in hyperbolic terms: 'We have looked over these four annual Poor-Law Reports with a variety of reflections; with no thought that our Poor-Law Commissioners are the inhuman men their enemies accuse them of being.'[45]

But if Carlyle distanced himself from the style of radical discourse, his writing nevertheless paralleled such oppositional journalism. Robert Breton's description of Carlyle's heightened rhetoric might be applied equally well to Cobbett or to the generation of writers Cobbett inspired: 'The exaggerated use of capitalization . . . italicized words, superlatives . . . inculcation, accusation, and the compounded biblical references keep his rhetoric at an exhaustingly intense pitch.'[46] One might also trace the oratorical mode in which Carlyle operated to Cobbett and his progeny. Like Carlyle, radical

[43] Ibid., p. 50.
[44] Carlyle, 'Chartism', p. 160. Vargo, *An Underground History*, pp. 71–4; O. Frankel, *State of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 40 and *passim*.
[45] Carlyle, 'Chartism', p. 164.
[46] R. Breton, *Gospels and Grit: Work and Labour in Carlyle, Conrad, and Orwell* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 50.

writers utilised frequent interjections, hortatory exclamations, and ventriloquised speech. Besides sharing aspects of Cobbett's style, Carlyle grappled with Cobbettite ideology. Specifically, he rejected invocations of the 'Forty-third of Elizabeth' as a historical precedent for the right to poor relief.[47] This 1601 law established a system of parish support for the poor, the aged, and disabled persons; the New Poor Law supplanted the early modern system with a centralised bureaucracy that enacted a number of punitive measures. Following Cobbett, many radicals asserted that the Elizabethan law established poor relief as an intrinsic part of the British constitution with precedence over even individual property rights.[48] Carlyle cautioned that 'the claim of the poor labourer is something quite other than that "Statute of the Forty-third of Elizabeth" will ever fulfil for him', language likely directed against Cobbett's popular *Legacy to Labourers* (1835).[49]

A final instance of Carlyle considering radical writing in *Chartism* is his extended treatment of the so-called Marcus pamphlet, a satire of the New Poor Law and Malthusian philosophy that received significant attention in the Chartist press. As Carlyle details, he purchased this tract from the Chartist publisher William Dugdale at his shop in Holywell Street off the Strand.[50] The pamphlet, which plays on Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' by recommending gassing infants as a solution to overpopulation, became a cause célèbre when the Chartist preacher Joseph Rayner Stephens accused the Poor Law commissioners of themselves authoring it. Stephens's sometimes literal but frequently metaphorical accusation led, improbably, to officials denying plans for state-sponsored infanticide.[51] Unable or unwilling to perceive the text's satire – or to credit that Chartist condemnations of the tract might be tongue-in-cheek – Carlyle assured his reader of its earnestness: 'What a black, godless, waste-struggling world, in this once merry England of ours, do such pamphlets and such editors betoken!'[52] Carlyle's misprision is doubly ironic: not only does his essay borrow from the satire of the pseudonymous Marcus, at one point suggesting the poor might be disposed of with

[47] Carlyle, 'Chartism', pp. 166–7. [48] Vargo, *An Underground History*, pp. 49–52.
[49] Carlyle, 'Chartism', p. 166; W. Cobbett, *Legacy to Labourers; or, What is the Right which the Lords, Baronets, and Squires, have to the Lands of England?* (London: Mills, Jowett, & Mills, 1835).
[50] Carlyle, 'Chartism', pp. 230–2.
[51] J. McDonagh, *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 101–12; Vargo, *An Underground History*, pp. 80–9. For a reading of Swift's satire in the generic context of the essay, see J. Strachan's 'Satire and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 16).
[52] Carlyle, 'Chartism', p. 230.

arsenic, but the radical pamphlet is itself Carlylean. Like Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, the pamphlet creates a fictional author, relies on layered ironies, criticises utilitarianism, features editorial condemnations of the text's philosophy, and proceeds in circuitous and turgid prose.

By the time of Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), the anti-reform elements in his thought had become dominant. This text engages with the changing landscape of radicalism in the post-1848 era, particularly with the 'red republicanism' of those who tried to synthesise Chartism with the brand of socialism that emerged in the French Revolution of 1848. Carlyle's first pamphlet rejects democracy out of hand, claiming that the struggle for popular rule simply expresses a desire for more appropriate (and more draconian) governance: 'you, silently, but eloquently, demand, in the name of mercy itself, that some genuine command be taken of you'.[53] Carlyle thus inverts democratic aims by employing 'a vocabulary that reifies the dichotomies of social difference'.[54] At the same time, however, the pamphlet adapts 'red republican ideas', if in an anti-democratic fashion. Carlyle calls for '"Regiments of the New Era" ... Industrial Regiments', which invoke the national workshops established in February 1848 by Louis Blanc and the Second Republic under pressure from militant Parisian workers (though in a crucial departure, Carlyle's 'regiments' feature forced labour). The essay notes the controversial nature of this proposal, which is made in the voice of an imagined 'Chief Minister': '*Here arises indescribable uproar, no longer repressible, from all manner of Economists, Emancipationists, Constitutionalists, and miscellaneous Professors of the Dismal Science.*'[55] Although a huge gulf separates Carlyle from the late Chartists, both had come to see that democracy alone might be insufficient to achieve a more just society, and that industry would henceforth be a terrain of struggle.

Countering Carlyle: Helen Macfarlane

Though largely unknown today, the radical journalist Helen Macfarlane's three-part review of the first *Latter-Day Pamphlet* gave voice to some of the most perceptive contemporary criticism of Carlyle's social analysis. The youngest child of a Scottish mill owner whose business went bankrupt in the downturn of 1842, Macfarlane had moved to Vienna by 1848 when she

[53] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 35.
[54] Bossche, 'Chartism, class discourse, and the captain of industry', p. 43.
[55] Ibid., p. 38 (original italics).

witnessed 'the Revolution against the Hapsburg monarchy [which] radicalized her'.[56] Fleeing the counter-revolution, she returned to Britain, living in Burnley, Lancashire, before moving to London.[57] There, she participated in the social milieu around the Fraternal Democrats, a left-wing Chartist organisation that emphasised solidarity with international movements and exiles in Britain. Macfarlane's biographer, David Black, has aptly termed her 'the shooting star of late-Chartist journalism'.[58] She wrote extensively for George Julian Harney's *Democratic Review* and *Red Republican* (often under the name Howard Morton), contributing articles on Dickens and the 'rose-water political sentimentalists of the Boz school', on oppositional political movements, and on the struggle of 'Labour vs. Capital'.[59] She was also the first translator of *The Communist Manifesto* into English, which appeared serially in *The Red Republican* from 9 November 1850. When she fell out with Harney over an insult by Harney's wife about her romantic connection with a German officer, Karl Marx complained of Harney's 'stupid and cowardly . . . break . . . with the only collaborator on his spouting rag who had original ideas – a rare bird, on his paper'.[60]

Macfarlane's commentary on Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* appeared in *The Democratic Review* in 1850, and was the only writing that did so under her name. It used Carlyle's essay to reflect on historical determinism, on the promises and failures of democracy in the United States, on the radical egalitarianism implicit in Christianity, and on contemporary British and continental politics. David Black points out that Macfarlane's method is '"Hegelian": in the sense of attempting to find common ground with the "opposition" and getting "inside" their essential concepts, so as to move them forward toward a new dialectical unity of principles'.[61] In this light, one can see how Macfarlane utilised Carlylean terms but endowed them with new meaning. Like Carlyle's first pamphlet, Macfarlane's review ends with a call 'to work'. Macfarlane, however, counters Carlyle's authoritarian vision of coerced labour: 'refuse to strike into it; shirk the heavy labour, disobey the rules, – I will admonish and endeavour to incite you; if in vain, I will flog you; if still in vain, I will at last shoot you'.[62] She recaptures 'work' to

[56] D. Black, Preface to H. Macfarlane, *Red Republican: Essays, Articles, and her Translation of the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Black (London: Unkant Publishers, 2014), p. iii.
[57] Ibid., p. x. [58] Ibid., p. v.
[59] H. Macfarlane (H. Morton), 'Fine words (household or otherwise) butter no parsnips', *Red Republican*, 1 (20 July 1850), 34; 'Labour versus capital: two chapters on Humbug', *Red Republican*, 1 (2–9 November 1850), 154–5, 162–3.
[60] K. Marx quoted in Black, Preface to H. Macfarlane, *Red Republican*, p. xxviii.
[61] Black, *Helen Macfarlane*, p. 108. [62] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 40.

encompass political organising aimed at democratising both government and economic life in a manner directly contrary to Carlyle: 'Let us to the work! . . . Our end is the Organisation of Labour and the final establishment of a pure Democracy; our means, the complete destruction of the Past through a critique of pure Reason.'[63]

A more dialectical reformulation of Carlyle's categories occurs in Macfarlane's discussion of the interconnected terms of 'sham-governors' and the 'hero'; Carlyle described the rulers deposed by the Revolution of 1848 as 'Sham-Kings, playacting as at Drury Lane', and imagined 'Captains of Industry' as the only social group capable of reasserting 'genuine command' in an age of democratic revolution.[64] Like other contemporary commentators, Macfarlane criticised Carlyle's embrace of 'hero-worship', but she did so in innovative terms.[65] In an analysis that anticipates aspects of Antonio Gramsci's concepts of 'force' and 'hegemony', she recasts the relationship between leaders and led. In effect, she points out that heroic individuals are made so only by their connection to society: 'If the governors express the *Idea of their age*, there is no need of coercion, everything goes on smoothly, in obedience to a natural law. Society follows its chiefs as gladly as the Crusaders did Baldwin or Peter the Hermit.'[66] What defines 'sham governors' is not a lack of intrinsic worth but a disalignment from 'the spirit of their age', which makes '*coercion* . . . the necessary condition for the existence of these "sham-governors" – who are *not* the exponents of any truth, but the representatives of the ghosts of old, dead, formulas; *not* the legitimate leaders of society, but charlatans and humbugs'.[67] Macfarlane thus argues that Carlyle's proposed solution, which ultimately depends upon the threat of coercion, would only restore the 'sham' leadership he so despised.

Macfarlane's reformulation of Carlyle's categories leads into a broader discussion of history in which she highlights a contradiction in Carlyle's essay. Carlyle recognises the dynamic changes gripping society but asserts that democracy goes against natural laws: 'there is a want of consistency in Mr Carlyle, admitting that *democracy is the fact of the present age*, and then denying that democracy is *possible*'.[68] Although Macfarlane's assertion that

[63] H. Macfarlane, 'Democracy: remarks on the times, apropos of certain passages in no. 1 of Thomas Carlyle's "Latter-Day Pamphlets"', *Democratic Review*, 1–2 (April–June 1850), vol. 1, 422–5, 449–53; vol. 2, 11–20, 19.
[64] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, pp. 10, 30.
[65] See M. Goldberg, Introduction to T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), pp. lxiv–lxv.
[66] Macfarlane, 'Democracy', vol. 1, 424. [67] Ibid.
[68] Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 15; Macfarlane, 'Democracy', vol. 1, 423.

democracy is 'the spirit of the age' risks making her argument circular, she develops a sophisticated theory of how the social relations of different epochs are sedimented in the present:

> We democrats know extremely well *why* we demand the abolition of existing social forms. It is because they are altogether opposed to the democratic, or Christian idea. They do not express this idea at all. They are fragments of an earlier world, a confused jumble of Jewish, Teutonic, and Roman laws, usages, and superstitions; in which the idea of our epoch has found a very narrow and uncomfortable habitation.[69]

A reflection on revolution and counter-revolution, Macfarlane's review anticipates key aspects of the famous opening of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, published only eighteen months later. Exploring the burdens of history that revolutionaries confront, she begins by quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> 'The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and majesty of the soul', says an American writer. We are haunted by the ghosts of old dead nations and cultures, and whenever we say, 'let us have done with the past, there is nothing in it any longer sacred for us, we find no form in it for *our* idea'; we are beset by the party of the past.[70]

Marx's elaboration adds a significant complication – those who seek to overthrow the old order have recourse, ironically, to the past themselves – but he confronts a like problem, uses similar metaphors, and even follows Macfarlane's syntax:

> The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.[71]

Ironically, a review of Carlyle's diatribe against democracy may have contributed to Marx's brilliant analysis of the failures of 1848. If the distance between Marx's polemical journalism and Carlyle's essays appears vast, this chapter has suggested that Carlyle's sustained dialogue with the radical press

[69] Macfarlane, 'Democracy', vol. 2, 11. [70] Ibid., vol. 2, 12–13.
[71] K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852; New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.

indicates the latter's importance in early Victorian cultural and political life. The conventions of radical journalism as well as the ideas developed within the context of radical campaigns influenced all manner of mainstream writing, including the essay, despite the latter's frequent association with middle-class readers and the assumption of an individual, contemplative subject as its intended audience. In the light of the radical press, then, political journalism, review essays, and even Carlyle's 'pamphlets' are profitably thought of as on a continuum, instead of as discrete genres.

27

Political Theory and Ethics in the Victorian Essay

BART SCHULTZ

If true, it would be a suggestive fact that John Stuart Mill's classic essay 'Utilitarianism' (1861) is the pre-1900 philosophical work most often stolen from university and college libraries.[1] Admirers of Mill might suggest that the theft could be justified for utilitarian reasons, that perhaps many cash-strapped students find the work so intensely pleasurable in its earnest defence of the greatest happiness as the ethical and political bottom line, that their swiping it has a positive net effect on the general happiness. But other explanations are possible – say, the low morals of ethical and political philosophers? – and no doubt the truth of the matter is messy, like the topic at hand.

The political essay of the 'longer than Victorian' era was, like the notion of happiness that figured so prominently in the politics of the time, pervasive, powerful, and elusive – a genre covering everything from Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798); to Anna Brownell Jameson's 'The Milliners' (1843); to John William Parker's edited volume of religious reformism, *Essays and Reviews* (1860); to Mill's classics 'On Liberty' (1859) and 'Utilitarianism' (1861); to Frances Power Cobbe's 'Wife-Torture in England' (1878); to Oscar Wilde's 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' (1891).[2] Perhaps

[1] See P. Singer and K. de Lazari-Radek, Introduction to J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Singer and de Lazari-Radek (New York: W.W. Norton, 2022), p. xi. Mill's work first appeared as a series of essays in *Fraser's Magazine*, later published in book form in 1863.

[2] Canonical names include William Hazlitt, Thomas Carlyle, Henry Mayhew, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, Walter Bagehot, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Herbert Spencer, John Henry Newman, Harriet Martineau, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Jowett, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, John Ruskin, William Morris, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Beatrice Webb, among others. Although as Denise Gigante observes, there is a shift from 'the Victorian tradition of social criticism' of, e.g., Carlyle, Arnold, and Ruskin, to 'the aestheticist form of the essay' in Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde, there were other currents as well, for 'as more people began to earn a living as professional writers, the age of literary patronage dissolved into a market-based economy', and in 'a commercial value system that rewarded economic labor and competition . . . imaginative activity could be viewed as idle'. D. Gigante, Introduction to *The Great Age of the English Essay: An Anthology*, ed. Gigante (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. xxxi, xxvii.

David Bromwich puts it too mildly when he observes that the 'political essay has never been a clearly defined genre'.[3]

Of course, the political essay may often seem recognisable by its contestation of arbitrary power, domination, and injustice, perceived in one way or another. But with such thematics, it must also be expected to change with the times and the places generating it – gaining, retaining, or losing its magnetism as historical memory takes over, as causes are won or lost, and as media change.[4] Still, why should Mill's work retain so much theft-inspiring magnetism, but not, say, Frances Power Cobbe's? This chapter will puzzle through the Victorian political essay by taking Mill's 'Utilitarianism' as a pole star for guidance: the work can provide a surprising amount of guidance, to both the best and the worst of the Victorian political essay in its many varieties, which included evasion as well as confrontation.[5] Broad generalisation though it may be, there is truth in the claim that the ethics and politics of nineteenth-century Britain can be summed up as a battle between utilitarians (or Benthamites or Philosophical Radicals) and their many critics, whether Whig or Tory, revolutionary or reactionary, Romantic or rationalist, intuitionist or idealist. What follows will highlight some of the costs of those conflicts for the political essay.

The Utilitarian Spirit of the Age

In the wake of the French Revolution, and with the growing influence of Romantic rejections of eighteenth-century rationalism, the utilitarians fought their way into public discourse at every turn and by every means – essays, manifestos, leaflets, pamphlets, speeches, and, increasingly, authoritative textbooks such as the younger Mill's *A System of Logic* (1843) and *Principles*

[3] D. Bromwich, Introduction to *Writing Politics: An Anthology*, ed. Bromwich (New York: New York Review Books, 2020), p. ix. This anthology and G. Himmelfarb's *The Spirit of the Age: Victorian Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) are indicative of the tired but familiar academic political spectrum on the political essay.

[4] The era generated a wealth of periodicals and newspapers serving an expanded public sphere, a broader reading and railway-riding public, though the medium could massage the message. As Alexander Macmillan put it when launching *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1859, 'I don't in the least believe ... that the aimless and frivolous is as interesting as that which means something'; quoted in G. Worth (ed.), *Macmillan's Magazine, 1859–1907: 'No Flippancy or Abuse Allowed'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 9. No longer were authors to remain anonymous, and the flip and frivolous, too often in fashion, were often directed elsewhere.

[5] See Gregory Vargo's 'The essay in the age of Chartism' in this volume (Ch. 26) for more on this topic.

of Political Economy (1848). But throughout the period of classical utilitarianism – from Jeremy Bentham, starting in the late eighteenth century, through such Benthamite disciples as John Austin and James Mill, through the latter's son John Stuart Mill and his partner Harriet Taylor, and finally to the Cambridge don Henry Sidgwick, who died in 1900 – the ethically charged political essay played a demanding, if shifting, role.

Bentham was a notoriously strange individual who wrote furiously and often with striking invective, but who published comparatively little, leaving it to his disciples to spread his word and edit his works. Those disciples, including the Mills, took the work seriously enough that Mill senior, under Bentham's direction, inflicted on his son an educational regimen akin to pedagogical child abuse in the name of creating the perfect utilitarian citizen. The younger Mill's consequent nervous breakdown, his recovery thanks to the poetry of William Wordsworth (and Percy Bysshe Shelley), and his sense of fulfilment as a whole being through his deep attachment and eventual marriage to his companion and collaborator Harriet Taylor (herself a powerful essayist), form the biographical backdrop to his extraordinary literary output.

Over the course of his life, the younger Mill engaged with, reflected, rejected, or assimilated nearly every significant cultural and intellectual current his world had to offer. As Stefan Collini explains:

> Mill is sometimes singled out as a quintessentially English thinker. In its crudest form this judgement is made up of equal parts of ignorance and prejudice, often laced with a dash of hostility. In fact, he was the least parochial of writers, and, with due allowance for the simplification inherent in such epitomes, one could as well say of him what Engels said of Marx, that the development of his thought combined English political economy, French Socialism, and (via Carlyle and Coleridge) German philosophy, as well as many other things.[6]

Which is not to deny, as Collini adds, that Mill is 'undoubtedly one of the most central figures in modern English intellectual history'.[7] So central, in fact, that one would be challenged to find any great essayists that Mill did not have something to say about, unless they came after his death. Mill published extensively in periodicals and journals, edited them, and worked out his

[6] S. Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 143.
[7] Ibid.

differences with writers like T.B. Macaulay, F.D. Maurice, Thomas Carlyle, and so many others in dialogue in them.

One piece of the stage-setting for the mature Mill was the famous confrontation between his father and Macaulay, played out in the pages of *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Westminster Review*. James Mill's 1820 'Essay on Government', which he contributed in a fifth supplement to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, was widely taken to be a definitive statement of the Benthamite position on the role of government in maximising the general happiness. Macaulay, who was eager to make a name for himself, had very mixed, Whiggish feelings about the Benthamites, disliking their analytical rational-actor models and their plans for the radical reform of Parliament, and he seized the opportunity. Yet, as Jack Lively and John Reese put it:

> As inevitable as an attack on the 'Essay' was from the *Edinburgh Review* was a reply from the *Westminster Review*. Founded by Bentham in 1824, *The Westminster Review* was intended, and for a time served, as the Utilitarian answer to the Whig and Tory organs, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*. The first suggestion was that Bentham should answer Macaulay's article but in the event the reply was written by Perronet Thompson, who incorporated in his article a condensation of a paper provided by Bentham on the history of his own ideas. This was the start of a debate which stretched over into 1830 and produced two further articles from Macaulay and two further replies from the *Westminster*.[8]

Macaulay's skills were very much on display throughout, in his witty lampooning of the Benthamites: 'No form which human folly takes is so richly and exquisitely laughable as the spectacle of a Utilitarian in a dilemma. What earthly good can there be in a principle upon which no man will act until he is all wise?'[9] There was more to human nature and culture than Benthamite calculation, which Macaulay saw as a hubristic exercise in fantasy anyway.

Mill junior took note. Indeed, his famous *Autobiography* (1873) scarcely captures all the upheavals of his mental life, his assimilation of such critiques along with notions of Romantic self-cultivation. These forces affected his thought in endless ways, though he always took himself to be refounding, rather than rejecting, utilitarianism. Distancing himself from the deductive, a

[8] J. Lively and J. Rees, Introduction to *Utilitarian Logic and Politics: James Mill's 'Essay on Government', Macaulay's Critique and the Ensuing Debate*, ed. Lively and Rees (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 5.

[9] T.B. Macaulay, 'Utilitarian theory of government and the "Great Happiness" principle' in Lively and Rees (eds.), *Utilitarian Logic*, p. 215.

priori, rational-actor approach of his father on display in the latter's 'Essay on Government', he fell in with Auguste Comte and the Saint-Simonians, with their positivist views about how human civilisational growth came in progressive historical phases, with the advances of science being the wave of the future. But greater sensitivity and attention to historical and cultural particularity were, to his mind, echoed everywhere, in Carlyle's work on the French Revolution and heroes, in Macaulay's political and historical writings, and, above all, in Alexis de Tocqueville's brilliant *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840).[10] The 'Germano-Coleridge' view had given him, in John Skorupski's formulation, the method of 'thinking from within':

> Thinking from within requires imaginative understanding of other people and other times, a lesson Mill drew from Coleridge. About other people's ideas, Mill says, Bentham's only question was, were they true? Coleridge, in contrast, patiently asked after their meaning. To pin down the fundamental norms of our thinking calls for careful psychological and historical inquiry into how people think, and also into how they think they should think – what kind of normative attitudes they display in their actions and their reflection. These must be engaged with to be understood. So thinking from within is inherently dialogical.[11]

And Mill's essayistic style was infused with his view of 'character' as a matter of making one's life one's own, with the achievement, through dialogue, of an active, self-directed, many-sided life, rich in the higher pleasures.[12] This meant achieving oneself via others, which his relationship with Harriet Taylor exemplified,' and this in a distinctly utilitarian way that has often baffled those hostile to that perspective – namely, with absorption in the details of particular issues and perspectives without overt resort to that ultimate utilitarian principle, the greatest happiness.

Still, Mill was quite self-conscious about his role in refounding utilitarianism. From 1834 until about 1840, he worked to insinuate his new ideas through essays published in *The Westminster Review*, and took a leading role in the early development of *The London Review*, which soon returned to the umbrella of the former to become *The London and Westminster Review*. In 1837, the latter was taken over by Mill, at a financial loss to himself, when the original owner,

[10] And he corresponded with everyone, notably Comte and de Tocqueville; Carlyle was an early if difficult friend who had wrongly identified him (the young Mill) as a potential disciple.

[11] J. Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today?* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 9–10.

[12] See also J. Carlisle, *John Stuart Mill and the Writing of Character* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), pp. 165–6.

William Molesworth, tired of the enterprise. Mill had already resolved to 'give full scope to my own opinions and modes of thought, and to open the Review widely to all writers who were in sympathy with Progress as I understood it'.[13] This yielded not only his sometimes sharply critical pieces on Bentham, but his admiring essay on Coleridge (one major 'spirit of the age', the other being Bentham) and the very telling essay on 'Civilization' (1836), 'into which I threw many of my new opinions, and criticised rather emphatically the mental and moral tendencies of the time, on grounds and in a manner which I certainly had not learnt from him' (meaning his father).[14] Mill was now forever finding himself in another, with essays that magnetised through a mix of hate and empathy, rage and love, yet always earnestly and endlessly heralding the possibility of progress. There was much ongoing growth here, through and beyond what Collini describes as 'the ferocity of his Philosophical Radical journalism of the 1820s and his savaging of Whig and Tory alike'.[15]

Mill's essay on 'Civilization' is indeed illuminating, though it was a relatively early production and can mislead. Mill laments, in terms evoking Carlyle, that the decline of individual heroism and spirit (and the inability to tolerate pain) were contributing to 'the growth, both in the world of trade and in that of intellect, of quackery, and especially of puffing', though 'nobody seems to have remarked, that these are the inevitable fruits of immense competition; of a state of society where any voice, not pitched in an exaggerated key, is lost in the hubbub'.[16] In an age of reading, Mill charges, people now read too quickly and shallowly, with few good indicators of quality. Overall, the age is witnessing 'the decay of individual energy, the weakening of the influence of superior minds over the multitude, the growth of charlatanerie, and the diminished efficacy of public opinion as a restraining power'.[17] And this is well before the great burst of magazine fervour.

'The Subjection of Women' and 'The Negro Question'

What is missing from too much of Mill's journalism up through the 1840s is his later impassioned, if too often compromised and postponed, search for

[13] J.S. Mill, *Autobiography* in J. Robson (ed.), *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 33 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91), vol. 1, p. 215.
[14] Ibid., p. 211.
[15] S. Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 20.
[16] J.S. Mill, 'Civilization' in Robson (ed.), *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 133. [17] Ibid., p. 135.

equality and non-domination in everyday life and human relations – the ideal that for him became real in his relationship with Harriet Taylor. As Maria Morales very effectively describes it:

> This ethic is general in that it encompasses not only what we might call a political morality – that is, a conception of morality appropriate to regulate the political life of a community – but most importantly a substantive social and personal morality. Mill's chief object as a reformer was to bring about a revolution in how people relate to each other in social and personal life. The idea of perfect equality is the core element of the general ethic of utility, which he understood as embracing the 'permanent interests' of progressive beings. These include interests in morality; benevolence; democracy, which is built on perfect equality; liberty, understood as in 'eternal antagonism' to power; human development; and human worth. Civil liberties, rights, opportunities, and other institutional ideals are instrumental to the creation of a just and democratic society.[18]

In Mill's own words from 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), which owed an enormous debt to his relationship with Harriet, his life partner:

> the true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals; claiming nothing for themselves but what they as freely concede to everyone else; regarding command of any kind as an exceptional necessity, and in all cases a temporary one; and preferring, whenever possible, the society of those with whom leading and following can be alternate and reciprocal. To these virtues, nothing in life as at present constituted gives cultivation by exercise. The family is a school of despotism . . . What is needed is, that it should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other.[19]

If this were to be the case, a heavy responsibility fell on the public moralist, on writers like Mill, who could point the way to where progress was headed, which was so far in advance of where things stood that it could seem like another planet – a happy planet filled with cooperative societies, well-rounded educational institutions, creative experiments in living, free thinking, and deep, loving relationships based on respect and friendship.

[18] M.H. Morales, *Perfect Equality: John Stuart Mill on Well-Constituted Communities* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), p. 17.

[19] J.S. Mill, 'The subjection of women' in A.P. Robson and J.M. Robson (eds.), *Sexual Equality: Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Helen Taylor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1994), p. 346. This collection does justice to H.T. Mill and H. Taylor in a way that remains too rare, and it includes examples of political writing that ought to be recognised as important forms of the essay. See also J.E. Jacobs and P.H. Payne (eds.), *The Complete Works of Harriet Taylor Mill* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

His ethical and political essays did have their brighter sides, when outlining what could be.

Admirable as 'The Subjection of Women', 'On Liberty', and 'Utilitarianism' may be, one can learn more about Mill's strengths and weaknesses as an essayist from one of his least commented on productions – his essay, in the form of a letter to the editor of *Fraser's* in 1850, titled 'The Negro Question'. This piece was a reply to none other than that prominent man of letters Thomas Carlyle, who had published his 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question' in the same magazine the previous year, and who, following Mill's contribution, published an expanded version of his original essay in pamphlet form in 1853, with the deliberately offensive title, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*.[20]

Carlyle's deranged performance throughout the exchange irreparably damaged his reputation, with even many old admirers distancing themselves from the increasingly isolated and nasty apostle of history as the tales of great heroic men. Belligerently racist, Carlyle parades every violent prejudice towards Black people known to humanity, depicting a stereotype of 'Quashee': a lazy, laughing, watermelon- (or 'pumpkin') eating inferior, fit only for paternalistic control and direction by 'the beneficent whip' of whites who are superior by birth. He calls for – or at least strongly suggests the desirability of – the reinstitution of slavery where it has been abolished, condemning, in his usual way, the cruelties of laissez-faire. He suggests that the slave ships are not as bad as critics claim, and that the slaves are happier as slaves. The prospect of emancipation he dismisses as cruel, without ever at any point showing even the thinnest knowledge of the realities of slavery and the slave trade. The entire odious performance is cast in an offensively humorous vein, satirising a 'Universal Abolition of Pain Association'.[21]

In a rejoinder worthy of his most polemical earlier years, Mill remarked of the slave trade: 'I have yet to learn that anything more detestable than this has been done by human beings towards human beings in any part of the earth.'[22] He charged Carlyle with

[20] See T. Carlyle, 'Occasional discourse on the Negro question', *Fraser's Magazine*, 40 (December 1849), 670–9, and J.S. Mill, 'The Negro question', *Fraser's Magazine*, 41 (January 1850), 25–31. The exchanges were republished together in E.R. August (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle, The Nigger Question, John Stuart Mill, The Negro Question* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971). S. Collini explicates the texts in his Introduction to Mill's *Collected Works*, vol. 21, pp. vii–lvi.

[21] Carlyle quoted in August (ed.), *Thomas Carlyle, The Nigger Question*, p. 2.

[22] Ibid., p. 40.

> the vulgar error of imputing every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference of nature. As well might it be said, that of two trees, sprung from the same stock, one cannot be taller than another but from greater vigour in the original seeding. Is nothing to be attributed to soil, nothing to climate, nothing to difference of exposure – has no storm swept over the one and not the other, no lightning scathed it, no beast browsed on it, no insects preyed on it, no passing stranger stript off its leaves or its bark? If the trees grew near together, may not the one which, by whatever accident, grew up first, have retarded the other's development by its shade?[23]

Mill identified himself with the 'thinking persons' who 'either doubt or positively deny' the innate inferiority of Black people. By contrast, the 'great ethical doctrine' of Carlyle's discourse, 'than which a doctrine more damnable, I should think, never was propounded by a professed moral reformer, is, that one kind of human beings are born servants to another kind'.[24] Such indeed was Carlyle's political perspective. No levity, no ornament, and no irony soften the severity of Mill's assault on it; his enhanced empathy only fuelled his raging indignation at cruelty.

This was Mill at his best, a fearless and earnest public moralist, the person of principle, whose anonymous essay might as well have been signed in huge red letters. Still, if this was his best, then the limits of his public political moralism become clearer. As Anthony Bogues and others have argued:

> So what we have here in the debate between Mill and Carlyle are the following. In one current of English political thought, difference was innate, created by nature, and as a consequence there was no chance of political and social equality for those who were nonwhite subjects of the empire. Another current admitted that the black and colonial subjects were indeed inferior but argued that this inferiority was not ordained by nature and therefore could be overcome by contact with civilisation and a process of tutelage. Both currents were united in their belief about black inferiority but disagreed on its root causes and naturalness. For those who thought that this so-called inferiority could be overcome, we should note that the goal was envisioned in terms of white normativity. To become fully human and a citizen, the colonial and black subject had to master the protocols of Western civilisation, to become in the words of the nineteenth-century English writer Anthony Trollope, a 'Creole Negro'.[25]

[23] Ibid., p. 46. [24] Ibid.

[25] A. Bogues, 'John Stuart Mill and "The Negro question": race, colonialism, and the ladder of civilization' in A. Valls (ed.), *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell

Mill's admiration for his father's *History of British India* (1817) and his own career, enabled by his father's position with the East India Company, are deeply suggestive of his complicity in the growth of the British Empire and in justifications for that growth grounded on existing racial differences.[26]

Similar difficulties figure in Mill's feminist writings, which often drew on parallel arguments and arboreal comparisons, though women of colour are absent from 'The Subjection of Women'. Mill nowhere flatly declares that such possible differences will render impossible the future egalitarian community that he so often invoked, and, like his more academic successor Sidgwick, he was at least capable of being so subversive of the dominant culture that whiteness and manliness had a very unsteady ally in him. Odd as it may sound, some found it easy enough to move from a Millian celebration of friendship to a sweeping condemnation of his version of civilisation. Edward Carpenter, who inherited his share of Millian liberalism from his father, would produce the genre-defying (and relatively unsung) essay 'Civilisation, Its Cause and Cure' (1889), which would influence Mahatma Gandhi in his efforts to throw off his own internalised desire to become 'an English gentleman'.

Carpenter's various works showcase his passionate, Whitman-inspired defence of homogenic love, his theorising of the 'intermediate sex', and his Morris-tinted utopian socialism, all marshalled in a condemnation of the hypocrisy of English civilisation (which, despite his Cambridge degree, Carpenter effectively dropped out of, living openly at Millthorpe with his lover George Merrill and supplementing his modest inheritance by making sandals). For Carpenter, English civilisation was sick, as he explained:

> Mentally, is not our condition most unsatisfactory? I am not alluding to the number and importance of the lunatic asylums which cover our land, nor to the fact that maladies of the brain and nervous system are now so common; but to the strange sense of mental unrest which marks our populations, and which amply justifies Ruskin's cutting epigram: that our two objects are, 'Whatever we have – to get more; and wherever we are – to go somewhere else'.[27]

University Press, 2005), p. 222. See also B. Schultz, *The Happiness Philosophers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[26] See U. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). For an account of the essay in the context of British imperialism in India (and against Mill's view of culture), see P. Joshi's 'Grist for the mill: history and the essay in India, 1870–1920' in this volume (Ch. 31).

[27] E. Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays* (Canton, ME: Greenleaf Books, 1972), p. 2. Gandhi's effort to throw off colonial education was in significant ways an effort to throw off the influence of Macaulay, who sought to erase Indian cultures and languages.

Mill never went that far. He did, thanks to the influence of Harriet Taylor Mill, become increasingly socialistic and keen on cooperative societies, but he was no Carpenter, and in his late years he wrote exclusively for *The Fortnightly Review* under the editorship of John Morley.[28] It was a perfect fit – he 'saw in the *Fortnightly* the kind of effective spearhead for progressive opinion which he had once hoped, prematurely, to make out of the *Westminster*, and the review in turn faithfully reflected most of his own leading ideas'.[29] And after all, Carpenter, for all his pre-hippyish charm, was invoking a 'back to nature' inversion of Mill's notion of progress – including a 'born that way' version of sexual ethics that suggested only one possible direction for the work of ethology that Mill had called for.[30] More often, such ideas, towards century's end, would be put to a very different end, lending weight to a supposedly 'scientific racism' that made Mill look tame by comparison.

The Academic Turn

Consider how the young Cambridge Millian, Henry Sidgwick, today deemed the most philosophically important of the classical utilitarians, followed and faltered in his master's footsteps. He too published in *The Westminster Review*, *Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*, *Fraser's*, and the *Fortnightly*, though his deeper influence came from his tomes, chiefly *The Methods of Ethics*, which first appeared in 1874, the year after Mill's death. Sidgwick had worried to his friends that Mill's influence was waning as a result of the public displays of his radicalism, and for all his discipleship his tone never reproduced the fury and indignation that is so palpable in many of Mill's essays. He was more academic, more professorial, and more concerned to very, very patiently work through the arguments from all sides in minute detail. So much so, that the standard complaint is that one can never be quite sure where Sidgwick finally stands on matters. If his philosophical work pointed to deep scepticism about the

See L. Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (London: Verso, 2018), ch. 6. Mill makes a cameo appearance in this work praising the feminist aspirations of the utopian Owenites.

[28] J. Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: English Literary Life since 1800* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), pp. 112–13.

[29] Ibid., p. 113.

[30] See B. Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 648–9, for more details on the filiations between Victorian research on sexuality and Victorian research on race invoking reductive explanations of 'national character' in terms of supposedly innate racial differences.

religious and ethical coherence of his culture, he was at the same time far more worried than Mill about whether the age might collapse in a morally rudderless egoistic and materialist mess of conflict and chaos.

But his essays, often lively and high-minded, have the kind of sharpness of expression that seems as close to Bertrand Russell as to Mill on matters of prolixity, which may not be coincidental given that Sidgwick was one of those who taught Russell at Cambridge. His ethical and political essays are typically sprinkled with some donnish humour.[31] Crucially, however, what Mill did so earnestly could be compromised by professional academics such as Sidgwick so much so that it resulted in political evasiveness. A singular example of this form of political essaying can be found in Sidgwick's commentary on the politics of his friend Charles Henry Pearson. What should have been a strained and then dissolved friendship was anything but. Pearson had studied at King's College, London and at Oriel College, Oxford, and eventually became education minister in Victoria, Australia, and a widely read force in the Liberal Party in general. Sidgwick knew him personally and professionally, and in a telling review essay, which appeared in *The National Review* in 1894, he warmly praised Pearson's *National Life and Character*, published the previous year, albeit with his typical qualms about the inadequate state of social science and the follies of 'prophecy':

> I will begin by remarking that prophecies are not always put forward, even by the most highly educated prophets, as based on a scientific grasp of the laws of social evolution. Indeed, in the most impressive book of a prophetic nature which has appeared in England for many years – I mean Pearson's *National Life and Character* – the prophecies are not announced with any such pretensions; they always rest on a simply empirical basis, and only distinguish themselves from the common run of such forecasts by the remarkably wide and full knowledge of relevant historical facts which the writer shows, and the masterly skill with which the facts are selected and grouped. His predictions are almost always interesting and sometimes, I think, reach a degree of probability sufficient to give them a real practical value.[32]

Although Pearson's book shows how Mill's worries about the possible loss of cultural vitality could be transmuted into an overtly racist mode of cultural critique, one would never guess this from Sidgwick's review. Pearson was an admirer of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henrik Ibsen, one who feared a future society of weak men with 'no purpose beyond supplying the day's needs, and

[31] See H. Sidgwick, *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 151.
[32] Ibid., p. 219.

amusing the day's vacuity'.[33] There are in his *National Life and Character* warped descendants of Millian thoughts in such lines about a sad, stationary state of society, character development, and ethology; but they have been adapted to a racist purpose closer to Carlyle's hero worship.

With Pearson, as with Carlyle, the human predicament had everything to do with race:

> Even during historical times, so-called, the world has mostly been peopled by races, either like the negro very little raised above the level of brutes, or at best, like the lower-caste Hindoo and the Chinaman, of such secondary intelligence as to have added nothing permanent to our stock of ideas. At this moment, though the civilised and progressive races have till quite recently been increasing upon the inferior types, and though the lowest forms of all are being exterminated, there seems, as we have seen, good warrant for assuming that the advantage has already passed to the lower forms of humanity, and indeed it appears to be a well-ascertained law that the races which care little for comfort and decency are bound to tide over bad times better than their superiors, and that the classes which reach the highest standard are proportionally short-lived.[34]

Pearson insists that the 'character of a race determines its vitality more than climate', striking an alarmist note and arguing that the day will come when the globe is

> girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so. . . . The citizens of these countries will then be taken up into the social relations of the white races, will throng the English turf, or the salons of Paris, and will be admitted to intermarriage. It is idle to say, that if all this should come to pass our pride of place will not be humiliated.[35]

Pearson fuelled fears of 'the Yellow Peril', the Chinese workers who could swamp the white labourers of the country, and he cited with approval the American laws restricting Chinese immigration.[36] For his part, Sidgwick – the supposed Millian – tended to mask such racial panic in polite academic terms; it worried him, but it did not anger him. Whatever Millian agnosticism Sidgwick may have shared concerning innate racial differences, his view was apparently broad enough to credit as worthy hypotheses Pearson's

[33] C.H. Pearson, *National Life and Character*: *A Forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1893), pp. 337–8.
[34] Ibid., p. 342. [35] Ibid., pp. 84–5.
[36] See also C.H. Pearson, *Reviews and Critical Essays* (London: Methuen, 1896); his essay 'The Black republic' strikes a slightly more moderate note.

claims about race and national character, and the possibility that greater knowledge in this area would provide deep cause for concern about the direction of civilisation.

After all, Sidgwick did allow that if evidence of racial 'debasement' from interracial marriage were forthcoming, then segregation should be maintained, as it should also be in cases where the 'inferior races' supplied most of the manual labour. And he harboured too few doubts that 'Civilized nations, so long as they are independent, have to fight; and, in performance of their legitimate business – for it is their legitimate business on utilitarian principles – of civilizing the world, they have to commit acts which cannot but be regarded as aggressive by the savage nations whom it is their business to educate and absorb.'[37] Yet nowhere in his ethical and political essays for a broad readership, did he earnestly and candidly address this issue of imposed and enforced 'civilisation'.

Others did. Sidgwick's brother-in-law, the future British prime minister Arthur Balfour, worried publicly that, 'if the world is again to be buried under a barbaric flood, it will not be like that which fertilized, though it first destroyed, the western provinces of Rome, but like that which in Asia submerged forever the last races of Hellenic culture'.[38] Theodore Roosevelt also counted himself an admirer of Pearson (and of Madison Grant), and together their celebration of Anglo-Saxonism suggests what is in effect a reading list for QAnon-style white supremacism. In a work that has been entirely ignored, Michael MacMillan's *The Promotion of General Happiness: A Utilitarian Essay* (1890), Pearson's views are presented as an explicitly utilitarian argument:

> There is a real danger of Chinese overrunning the world . . . What would be the result upon general happiness if all over the world cheap yellow labour were to take the place of our white labourers in the field and in the workshop? The immediate result would undoubtedly be much misery among the displaced white workmen, who would suffer terribly from starvation and almost more from their indignation at being driven out of existence by an inferior race of men. This indignation would express itself in continual riots that would inflict pain upon white assailants and still more on the weaker yellow men.[39]

[37] H. Sidgwick, *Lectures on the Ethics of T.H. Green, Mr Herbert Spencer, and J. Martineau* (London: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 236–7.

[38] A. Balfour, 'Decadence' in W. Short (ed.), *The Mind of Arthur James Balfour* (New York: G.H. Doran, 1918), p. 92.

[39] M. MacMillan, *The Promotion of General Happiness: A Utilitarian Essay* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1890), pp. 67–8.

While there is some Millian earnestness in MacMillan's utilitarian essay, no vestige remains of Millian intelligence or literary skill.

What can one say about these distinguished public moralists and educators engaged in polite discourse about the future of whiteness and the inferiority of other races? Sidgwick's evasive tactics seem designed to reassure the reading public that Pearson is a good man soberly engaged in the difficult art of political prophecy, without ever acknowledging just what is being prophesied, sticking instead to general concerns about the state of social-scientific forecasting, with some digs at Herbert Spencer ('who stands before us as an impressive survival of the drift of thought in the first half of the nineteenth century').[40] More than half the review is given over to Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution* (1894), and it is only there that he manages a very distant approximation to Mill's outrage:

> As for the general superiority of the Anglo-Saxon in his dealings with inferior races – I think that any Anglo-Saxon who will study with strict impartiality 'the wretched details of ferocity and treachery which have marked the conduct of civilised men in their relations with savages' [quoting Herman Merivale] is not likely to rise from the study thanking heaven that he is not a Frenchman or Spaniard; but rather with a humble hope that the page of history recording these details is now turned.[41]

But it is all too civil, too urbane, and in this department of the political essay, Sidgwick's style reflects the late Victorian current of educated opinion that held that for many hot topics – race and imperialism, the subjection of women, sexual identity, parapsychology – men of letters needed to tone it down and work as under-labourers to new soberly scientific elites capable of moving public opinion through the weight of professional expertise.[42] Sidgwick had a way of never being candid himself but always seeming to

[40] Sidgwick, *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses*, p. 222. [41] Ibid., pp. 231–2.

[42] And this at the very time when the great anti-lynching journalist Ida B. Wells, a better essayist than any of those included in the stock collections, was touring England and winning recognition in the newspapers and progressive religious circles, while being ignored by the academic essayists. See I. Wells, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader* (New York: Penguin, 2014). Wells was hosted by the extraordinary Catherine Impey, 'a British Quaker who was the founder and editor of an anti-imperialist journal called *Anti-Caste* (1888–95)'; M. Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2009), p. 134. *Anti-Caste* was expressly dedicated to anti-racism and exposing such things as the horrors of lynching in the United States, and in doing so stood alone among the journals and magazines, though with support from some newspapers. There were no Sidgwicks among the contributors, or any other leading 'men of letters'. See also C. Bressey, *Empire, Race, and the Politics of Anti-Caste* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

be, while bringing an educated dullness and hesitancy to topics that Bentham and Mill would have earnestly ripped into. As a model for the political essay, his approach has been all too influential on generations of academic political essayists from John Rawls and Isaiah Berlin to Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum.[43] Lamentably, any list of Sidgwick's essayistic progeny would include many names, not least C.D. Broad, R.M. Hare, Brian Barry, G.E.M. Anscombe, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Derek Parfit, all of whom contrived even to avoid the avoidances when analysing, criticising, defending, or mimicking Sidgwick. Perhaps the low morals of various academic ethical and political philosophers actually can explain those missing library books.[44]

[43] See, e.g., B. Schultz, 'Review essay: John Rawls's last word', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 39:1 (March 2009), 107–14.

[44] See E. Schwitzgebel, 'Do ethicists steal more books?', *Philosophical Psychology*, 22:6 (December 2019), 711–25.

28

Plain English: Essays and Analytic Philosophy

ERIN PLUNKETT

The essay's roots in *experience* rather than *a priori* truths or totalising philosophical systems made it the favoured form of the fathers of British empiricism, Francis Bacon and David Hume. So it is perhaps the natural choice for analytic philosophy, which, as it developed in the early twentieth century, located its origins in this tradition, rejecting the continental idealism that had dominated British philosophy in the previous century. Yet the empiricist legacy poses certain challenges for the essay as a form of philosophical writing. What does it mean to ground essayistic writing in experience? What is 'plain English' in the analytic tradition, and what does it oppose? What are the limits of analytic philosophy's emphasis on mathematical simplicity and economy of style? At least in one influential definition of the term, the essays in this tradition strive not to be essays.

Already in Bacon, the first English writer to refer to his texts as essays, the philosophical difficulty of a writing grounded in experience is evident.[1] Bacon writes in the dedication to his *Essayes* (1597) that he has pursued in them 'a nature whereof a man shall find much in experience, little in books, so as they are neither repetitions nor fancies'.[2] This curious remark puts experience at odds with book writing and suggests that for Bacon and those who inherit his legacy, philosophical essayism must contend with the temptations inherent in writing itself. If, as others have argued, the analytic tradition can be regarded as a more or less coherent *style*, it is writing that wants to disavow its writerliness, which consciously models itself after the 'language' of mathematics.[3] While

[1] K. Murphy, 'Of sticks and stones: the essay, experiment, and experience' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 89.

[2] F. Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. M. Kiernan (1625; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 317.

[3] See L.M. Hinman, 'Philosophy and style', *The Monist*, 63:4 (October 1980), 512–29; H.J. Glock, *What is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1985), p. vi.

the father of analytic philosophy, Bertrand Russell, wrote essays that could be published in any nineteenth-century literary anthology, the aims of analytic philosophy and particularly the model of language that Russell helped to develop led to a more systematic form, culminating in the academic journal article that is today's standard for professional analytic philosophy. To see where the essays of analytic philosophers fit into the history of the British essay, this chapter will explore their immediate philosophical context and the ambiguous legacy of empiricism that they claim as their own.

Towards an Analytic Style

There is a natural progression from empiricism to analytic philosophy as it developed in Cambridge in the early part of the twentieth century. Towering figures like Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, and the young Ludwig Wittgenstein all worked with the new 'logical analytical method' pioneered by the German philosopher and logician Gottlob Frege. In the years surrounding the First World War, analytic philosophy was far from being a defined field with a uniform set of questions and pursuits. Still, the logical-analytic method was distinct and recognisable as a new approach to philosophy, a break with the Hegelian idealism that had taken hold in Europe and England in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Russell associated both Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel with the 'classical tradition', which, he lamented, 'having vanquished the opposing tradition of the English empiricists, held almost unquestioned sway in all Anglo-Saxon universities'.[4] The new breed of analytic philosopher was wary of the ambitious system-building associated with idealism, particularly when the system purported to glimpse a metaphysical reality behind the apparent world of experience.[5] To Russell's mind, the tradition was prone to drawing conclusions that 'contradict patent facts'.[6]

In contrast to the synthetic tendencies of idealists, analytic philosophers favoured modern 'methods of experiment and observation'. Theirs would be a 'scientific' philosophy guided by 'the disinterested curiosity that characterises the genuine man of science'.[7] Russell expressed a sentiment shared by many twentieth- and twenty-first-century analytic philosophers when he

[4] B. Russell, 'The twentieth century' in *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), p. 15.
[5] See G.E. Moore's early essay, 'The refutation of idealism', *Mind*, 12:48 (1903), 433–53.
[6] Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 18. [7] Ibid., pp. 18, 26.

claimed that the analytic method 'regards philosophy as essentially one with science' and 'conceives that all knowledge is scientific knowledge, to be ascertained and proved by the methods of science'.[8] A.J. Ayer, the father of logical positivism and one of the giants of analytic philosophy, did not hesitate to identify the analytic project with 'a standpoint that has always been implicit in English empiricism'.[9] Yet, as in literary, artistic, or architectural modernism of the same period, the philosophers working in the analytic method understood themselves to be doing something radically new.

Unlike Kant and Hegel, whom Russell saw as 'adapting to present needs the methods and results of the great constructive philosophers from Plato downwards', analytic philosophers were not beholden to the history of philosophy and did not see themselves as merely contributing to a philosophical conversation already in progress.[10] John Maynard Keynes, a member along with Moore, Russell, Lytton Strachey and (later) Wittgenstein of the society known as the Cambridge Apostles, described the heady atmosphere of Cambridge at the turn of the century. Reading Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) was 'exciting, exhilarating, the beginning of a renaissance, the opening of a new heaven on a new earth, we were the forerunners of a new dispensation'.[11] Given that a professed break with tradition was characteristic of all modernisms, much of this attitude was likely attributable to the rapid pace of change wrought by nineteenth-century industrialisation, along with other radical social and political upheavals taking place across Europe. The Edwardians' perceived liberation from Victorian attitudes no doubt contributed to the sense of novelty.[12]

However, there were distinctly philosophical reasons for this break of the early analytic philosophers from their predecessors. Russell's and Moore's early critiques of idealism, specifically of their idealist forebears at Cambridge, F.H. Bradley, and J.M.E. McTaggart, expressed a concern that philosophy had strayed too far from the empirical into what Bacon called 'fancies'. Two common targets were idealist theories of the subject and metaphysical holism. Russell and Moore attacked the notion, common to idealism and other strands of continental thought, that subject and object are

[8] B. Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. R.E. Egner and L.E. Dennon (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 244.
[9] A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 42.
[10] Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. 14.
[11] J.M. Keynes, *Two Memoirs: Dr Melchior, a Defeated Enemy, and My Early Beliefs* (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1949), pp. 80–1.
[12] D. Sidorsky,'The uses of the philosophy of G.E. Moore in the works of E.M. Forster', *New Literary History*, 38:2 (Spring 2007), 246.

interdependent, that the known cannot be meaningfully separated from the knower. They rejected as incoherent the basic principle of holism, that the part cannot be understood outside the context of the whole.[13]

The anxiety underlying both of these critiques was that the possibility of truth would be undermined if things (including, crucially, arguments and propositional statements) could not be separated into discrete particulars and dealt with as such. How could the truth of a statement be determined if everything depended on everything else? Or if knowledge was dependent on a knower? These considerations would turn out to have a significant impact on ways of writing. Indeed, analytic philosophers identify in continental idealism a tendency toward obscurity, or covering gaps in logic with an impenetrable style. The analytic style, by contrast, championed clarity, simplicity, and methodological precision. Analytic philosophers sought to remove subjectivity from their writing as much as possible, preferring the tone of the disinterested witness to the potentially contaminating presence of subjective will and desire.[14] They also came to treat the problems of philosophy as discrete, with specialised branches of knowledge to tackle separate problems in detail, rather than relying on a more holistic dialectic between part and whole that essays tend to foreground in their use of circularity and occasionality.[15]

The logical-analytic method from which analytic philosophy takes its name seeks to clarify the logic of all possible, meaningful statements that can be made about the world, separating out 'sense' from 'nonsense'. This separation largely relies on breaking statements down into component parts, which, it is believed, will root out potential contradictions or ambiguities. The aim of such a method is to avoid the errors and supposed 'pseudo-problems' to which philosophy has been prone. For followers of this method, it will turn out that many of the problems in the history of philosophy are grounded in *linguistic* confusion. As Ayer remarks: 'It is true that many of the traditional problems of philosophy have revealed themselves as being closely connected with questions of language.'[16] The notion that philosophical

[13] See, e.g., Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, p. 19, and *Basic Writings*, pp. 166–8.
[14] Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World*, pp. 26–9.
[15] See E. Plunkett, *A Philosophy of the Essay: Scepticism, Experience and Style* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
[16] Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 14. Russell's famous example of such confusion is the statement, 'The present King of France is bald', which appears to present a logical paradox because there is no present King of France and yet the sentence has a meaningful grammar; a predicate attaches to a non-entity. Russell's solution is his theory of definite descriptions in his paper 'On denoting' (1905). Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. 18.

problems can be reduced to linguistic problems is known as the 'linguistic turn'. Historians of philosophy consider this the defining feature of the practice of analytic philosophy, at least until the 1960s.[17] The assumption among analytic philosophers from Russell to Ayer was that the precise use of language, upheld by rigorous logic, would make many traditional philosophical problems evaporate.[18]

Analytic philosophers did not, as a rule, understand their concerns about language to be questions of *style*. Wittgenstein was an exception in that he was deeply committed to the question of an appropriate philosophical style, and was convinced, like Friedrich Schlegel and Søren Kierkegaard, that philosophy ought to be written as poetry, fusing form and content.[19] Wittgenstein's decidedly continental influences distinguish him from his fellow Cambridge analytic philosophers, and this distinction shows up in his writing – fragments or aphorisms rather than essays – no less than in his ideas.[20] Very few philosophers within the analytic tradition discuss their writing as such, beyond passing remarks that either bemoan the 'rhetoric' of other philosophers or praise the 'clarity' or 'rigour' of a favoured method.[21] As Bernard Williams describes the analytic project, it strives for 'moderately plain speech . . . it distinguishes sharply between obscurity and technicality'.[22] To the extent that there are stylistic virtues within analytic philosophy, they are generally allied with mathematical or logical proofs. To quote Ralph Humphries, analytic writing dictates 'a minimum of aesthetic and metaphorical embellishment . . . As with proofs in mathematics, elegance and economy of argumentation are prime virtues.'[23]

[17] See, e.g., M. Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993).

[18] Wittgenstein wryly refers to this as a 'loss of problems'; L. Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 81.

[19] L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. A. Pichler, trans. P. Winch, revised 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 24.

[20] For a reading that locates Wittgenstein's use of the aphorism in the Austrian essayist Karl Kraus's development of the form, see R.T. Gray, 'From impression to epiphany: the aphorism in the Austrian "Jahrhundertwende"', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 20:2 (1987), 81–95.

[21] An illustration of the virtues and vices of analytic writing can be seen in Ayer's assessment of the philosopher C.D. Broad: 'The subject is discussed from every angle, the various possibilities judiciously set out, the precedents cited, the fallacious arguments exposed: nothing is skimped: looking for reason, we are not fobbed off with rhetoric'; A.J. Ayer, *Part of My Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1977), pp. 117–18.

[22] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. vi.

[23] R. Humphries, 'Analytic and continental: the division in philosophy', *The Monist*, 82:2 (1999), 266. This lack of self-consciousness about their own use of language is what Theodor W. Adorno attacks in the later analytic school of the logical positivists. See T.W.

Where did such a conception of language and writing leave the philosophical essay that had been the standard form of philosophical expression? With the exception of Wittgenstein's preference for aphorisms, which will be discussed in more detail, early analytic philosophers adopted the essay as the preferred form of philosophical discourse. In many ways, this mode fitted well with the aims that analytic philosophy developed for itself during the first decades of the twentieth century. There was continuity between Russell and Moore and an earlier tradition of British philosophical essay writing going back to Hume, John Locke, and Bacon. This lineage is key to understanding how the essay evolved in twentieth-century philosophy.

Experience in the Philosophical Essay

Analytic philosophers recognised their origin in British empiricism, a mode of philosophising that was, from its inception, tied to essay writing. Broadly speaking, philosophical essayism from Michel de Montaigne onwards turns to experience out of a scepticism about *a priori* truth claims of the kind found in scholastic and rationalist philosophy.[24] We have already noted Bacon's wish to distance himself from 'bookish' scholastic methods. And in an infamous remark from his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Hume rejects much of what had borne the name of philosophy, declaring that if a work fails to treat either abstract mathematical principles or 'experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence', it should be committed 'to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion'.[25] This rejection of scholasticism and rationalism prefigures the analytic philosophers' rejection of idealism. With experience as the source of knowledge, philosophising becomes a necessarily open-ended project, ongoing and provisional, since experience itself has an open structure.

Viewed in this light, analytic philosophy's tendency towards minute discussions of 'problems' within a specialised research field (e.g., philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, epistemology) can be seen as a gesture of humility about what philosophical analysis is capable of achieving. Like the

Adorno, 'The essay as form (1958)', trans. B. Hullott-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 151–71.

[24] I have argued elsewhere that these two varieties of scepticism are both rooted in ancient Greek Pyrrhonism. See E. Plunkett, 'The essay as phenomenology' in M. Aquilina (ed.), *The Essay at the Limits: Poetics, Politics, and Form* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 23–36.

[25] D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T.L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 123.

scientist, analytic philosophers see their research as contributing to a specific area of knowledge, and they shy away from making expansive claims. Russell explains that the analytic method 'does not aim, as previous philosophy has usually done, at statements about the universe as a whole or at the construction of a comprehensive system. It believes, on the basis of its logic, that there is no reason to deny the apparently piecemeal and higgledy-piggledy nature of the world.'[26] Philosophy is 'piecemeal' because it is rooted in experience, which is likewise piecemeal. But, it must be noted, 'experience' is not understood in the same way by all who claim to be writing in its name. In analytic philosophy, experience tends to be associated with the empirical sciences rather than with *personal* experience, as one would find in Montaigne. To quote Russell: 'Philosophy should be piecemeal and provisional *like science*; final truth belongs to heaven, not to this world.'[27] While Montaigne situates the provisionality of knowledge within the framework of subjective experience, Russell associates provisionality with the *objectivity* of a scientific method that aims to move beyond a subjective perspective. Both affirm experience in contrast to *a priori* metaphysical claims, but they mean something very different by experience.

Analytic writings may be 'piecemeal', and 'provisional', but they do in fact work toward *systematic* truth like the sciences, progressing through provisional hypotheses in various fields toward a systematic understanding of the world. This is a systematicity grounded in repeated experience or experiment, from which universal truths can be extracted. Such a system is open to revision because it is built on the recognition that further experience can open new perspectives, but it is no less systematic for that. This way of thinking about experience and knowledge grew out of a specific tradition of philosophical essayism: the essays of Bacon and Locke, which departed from the Montaignian essay in significant ways.

Tim Milnes locates a divergence in the essay form that begins with Montaigne and Bacon and continues through the Enlightenment. Though British philosophical essayism is closer to Bacon than Montaigne, the tradition includes both of these influences, and it is this complex legacy that the analytic philosophers of the twentieth century inherit. According to Milnes, the open, conversational essay drew upon a Montaignian tradition rooted in scepticism, dialogue, and the idea of rationality as fundamentally

[26] Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. 244.
[27] From B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy*, quoted in Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. xix; my emphasis.

performative; this in turn produced a form of pragmatic and 'socialised' empiricism that was at ease with the idea of human knowledge as intersubjectively constituted.[28] Hume falls within this Montaignian tradition, with his emphasis on the interrogation and intersubjective formation of 'common sense' and his attempt to unite philosophical writing with ordinary conversation.[29] As Milnes argues, the (Baconian) systematic essays of the Enlightenment, spurred on by Locke's monumental attempt to establish 'order' in human intellectual inquiry, deployed the essay as an instrument for establishing Universal Truth and what Leibniz termed 'demonstrative knowledge'.[30]

The Analytic Philosopher as Public Intellectual

While it is clear that the Baconian–Lockean essay came to dominate the British philosophical essay tradition, there were important exceptions, and there are also later strands of analytic thought that attempted to revive the Montaignian approach. Bertrand Russell straddled both traditions. In his writings, one sees the divided legacy of philosophical essayism most saliently, as he maintained a strong Montaignian–Humean emphasis on scepticism and conversationality while ultimately contributing to a more Baconian–Lockean conception of what philosophical writing should achieve. Russell wrote hundreds of essays in his lifetime, both popular and more narrowly philosophical. In the 1930s, he was a regular contributor of essays to American newspapers like *The New York American*. While other notable British writers and intellectuals also contributed to these periodicals, Russell was prodigious. In 1933, he was writing nearly an essay a week. He was at home as a popular essayist, writing on every topic imaginable, with titles like 'Who May Use Lipstick', 'On Bores', 'Furniture and the Ego', 'On Tact', and 'On the Fierceness of Vegetarians'.[31] His politics and sexual mores skewed liberal; he was a committed pacifist and feminist. He was cosmopolitan and witty, and his healthy disregard for the *comme il faut*, along with the exotic fact of his being an English lord, no doubt appealed to an American audience.

[28] See T. Milnes's 'Incoherence brought to order: empiricism and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 4).
[29] See E. Plunkett, 'Concepts in conversation in the Humean essay' in *A Philosophy of the Essay*, pp. 53–76.
[30] Milnes, 'Incoherence brought to order', in this volume.
[31] See B. Russell, *Mortals and Others: American Essays, 1931–1935*, ed. H. Ruja, 2 vols. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1975), vol. 1.

Though Russell's fame as a mathematical–philosophical genius preceded his writing of popular essays, it is unlikely that many of the readers of 'Lipstick' had read the three-volume *Principia Mathematica* (1910–13). Those with the ability and inclination to read the full range of his work were not always complimentary about his popular writings. Wittgenstein, whose own wit ran to the caustic, made dismissive remarks about Russell's more popular efforts, including longer essayistic works such as *The Conquest of Happiness* of 1930 ('vomitive') and *What I Believe* ('harmful') of 1925.[32] His most infamous barb was reported second-hand by his friend Maurice O'Connor Drury: 'Russell's books should be bound in two colours, those dealing with mathematical logic in red – and all students of philosophy should read them; those dealing with ethics and politics in blue – and no one should be allowed to read them.'[33]

Whatever the grounds for Wittgenstein's dismissal, Russell's popular writing was by no means an aberration in his philosophical career, nor was it solely motivated by the financial hardship that followed Russell's anti-war campaigning. Russell was a public intellectual from the beginning, driven by his commitment to politics and progressive social ideals, and he considered it part of his role to present ideas to the public, not only to fellow mathematicians and logicians.[34] He claimed that his popular essays pursued the common object of 'the diminution of cruelty and ignorance in human affairs'.[35] In this aim, he followed Hume's admonition that essays ought to create a 'league betwixt the learned and conversable worlds', a sentiment that was shared by the periodical essayists of the eighteenth century, especially Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.[36] The value of 'conversable' writing was for Russell, as for his Enlightenment forebears, to bring learned opinions and arguments into the public sphere and thereby to awaken public moral and intellectual consciousness. In the years surrounding the First World War, Russell published both signed and anonymous essays in the anti-war periodical *The Tribunal*, voicing positions that led to a prison

[32] R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 294.
[33] M.O'C. Drury, *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein*, ed. D. Berman, M. Fitzgerald, and J. Hayes (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 1981), p. 127.
[34] For a broader treatment of public intellectualism and the essay, see P. Marks's 'The essay and the public intellectual' in this volume (Ch. 43).
[35] B. Russell to Karel Berka, 27 September 1966, quoted in A. Brink and R.A. Rempel, 'The importance of the essayist on social issues', *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 33–34 (Spring–Summer 1979), 13.
[36] D. Hume, 'Of essay writing' in *Selected Essays*, ed. S. Copley and A. Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

sentence and to his break with Cambridge. His American essays of the 1930s, though they are witty and lighter in tone, address serious topics, such as the backwardness and cruelty of norms regarding education, sexuality, race, violence, and the natural world.

The American essays are not radically different in style or tone from any of Russell's writings, barring works of pure logic like the *Principia*. And while his philosophical views changed significantly over time, his writing voice remained distinctive – clear, economical, free of technical jargon even when discussing complex philosophical topics. In a remark that expressed the cardinal virtues of analytic writing, Aldous Huxley praised Russell's 'plain English': 'There is no hiding behind obscurities, no pretending that the subject is understandable only by specialists . . . Everything is perfectly clear and above board . . . Russell dives deep, but comes up every time as clean as a whistle.'[37]

'Plain speaking' or 'plain English' is a commonly cited virtue of essayistic as well as analytic writing. It evokes writing with clarity and minimal adornment. Huxley contrasts it with the use of jargon and neologisms that 'may foster, in the bewildered reader's mind, the illusion that some thought of exceptional profundity and importance is being expressed'.[38] This sentiment is so common among British essayists that it seems to be a point of national pride, and in the twentieth century it underlies the feelings of hostility among many analytic philosophers towards the continental tradition, which they see as obscurantist. The antagonism came to a head in the infamous 1992 protest by prominent analytic philosophers against the proposal to award Jacques Derrida an honorary degree from Cambridge. In a signed letter, they claimed that 'M. Derrida's work does not meet accepted standards of clarity and rigor.'[39]

There is a sense among analytic philosophers that 'plain English' is bound up with ideals of democratic governance, including a common pursuit of truth by an informed civil society.[40] Writings that are deemed 'obscure' –

[37] A. Huxley, 'The relevance of style', quoted in R.K. DasGupta, 'Russell as a man of letters', *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 9 (Spring 1989), 8–9.

[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] The letter further claims that Derrida's writings 'seem to consist in no small part of elaborate jokes and puns ("logical phallusies" and the like) and M. Derrida seems to us to have come close to making a career out of what we regard as translating into the academic sphere tricks and gimmicks similar to those of the Dadaists or of the concrete poets'. J. Derrida, *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 420. See also N. Levy, 'Analytic and continental philosophy: explaining the differences', *Metaphilosophy*, 34:3 (April 2003), 284–304.

[40] See B. Russell's 'Philosophy and politics' and 'Philosophy for laymen' in his *Unpopular Essays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), pp. 11–31 and pp. 32–44, respectively.

French or German philosophy is nearly always the target – suggest a dubious politics. There are countless examples of such charges, but Martha Nussbaum's critique of Judith Butler's writing is exemplary: 'When ideas are stated clearly, after all, they may be detached from their author: one can take them away and pursue them on one's own. When they remain mysterious (indeed, when they are not quite asserted), one remains dependent on the originating authority. The thinker is heeded only for his or her turgid charisma.'[41] There is some truth to the statement that an air of mystery adds to writerly authority. But the issue with such arguments is that what it means to be 'clear' is never really interrogated, and the judgments about who is 'clear' and who is 'obscure' are rarely democratic.

Usually, as in the case of the outcry over Derrida's honorary degree, claims of obscurity are made by a group of like-minded philosophers who wish to maintain control over what counts as philosophical thinking and 'rigorous' philosophical writing, and that remains true today. But there are other models of clarity that are alien to the analytic conception. In Montaigne, clarity comes from a relentless, performative self-consciousness and a willingness to allow contradictions and inconsistencies to remain in his writing.[42] There can be rigour in texts that are *not* excessively polished and on the part of philosophical essayists who do not attempt to shine light in every dark corner. And if philosophical writings can only use language 'scientifically', then philosophy is at odds with one of the hallmarks of its own chosen form of expression, essay writing, namely that it straddles the artistic and the scientific, as György Lukács argues in his famous essay on the essay.[43] In Lukács's account, an essay is interested in truth, and it is faithful to the experience that occasions it, but with the recognition that the only way to achieve this fidelity is to foreground the issue of style and to cultivate a kind of poetic or literary writing.

In Montaigne and Kierkegaard, whom Lukács cites as model essay writers, there is a profound meditation on the relationship between style and epistemological and ethical positions, making style a matter of the utmost

[41] M. Nussbaum, 'The professor of parody: the hip defeatism of Judith Butler', *New Republic* (22 February 1999), 39.

[42] 'Sometimes my mind launches out with paradoxes which I mistrust and with verbal subtleties which make me shake my head; but I let them take their chance . . . . I describe myself standing up and lying down, from front and back, from right and left and with all my inborn complexities.' M. Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 376.

[43] G. Lukács, 'On the nature and form of the essay' in *Soul and Form*, trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974), pp. 1–18.

importance for any philosophical writer. When Wittgenstein, who like Lukács was deeply influenced by Kierkegaard's conception of style, proposed that philosophy 'ought to be written only as a *poetic composition*', he had not only formal but also ethical considerations in mind, specifically the ethics of philosophical communication, of whether truth can be taught in any direct sense.[44] In a marginal comment on his copy of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Fables in Prose and Verse* (1887), Wittgenstein asks, 'Should everyone try, and is it possible, at all times to write a lapidary style?! If anyone tries to do this at the wrong time, he gives only artificial lapidarity.'[45] This apparent recognition of the *limits* of clarity is absent in his analytic colleagues, and was not seriously taken up by anyone in the tradition until Iris Murdoch, who also trained in philosophy at Cambridge, began writing philosophical essays and fiction in the 1950s.[46]

The Ethics of Analytic Essayism

To understand the performative contradiction in analytic philosophy to which I allude in the introduction to this chapter, it is necessary to revisit the mathematical-logical conception of language within analytic philosophy. Many analytic philosophers explicitly link their writing to mathematical and scientific models, often in contrast to literary style. Russell again gives voice to these wider trends in the field. He describes his own approach to writing in an unassuming essay entitled 'How I Write' (1951):

> [I wrote according to an] ideal, derived, I suppose, from mathematics. I wished to say everything in the smallest number of words in which it could be said clearly. Perhaps, I thought, one should imitate [Karl] Baedeker rather than any more literary model. I would spend hours trying to find the shortest way of saying something without ambiguity, and to this aim I was willing to sacrifice all attempts at aesthetic excellence.[47]

Russell's appeal to mathematics and to the Baedeker guidebooks is as telling as his rejection of literary models. Distinguishing between a literary and a mathematical-philosophical style, he situates his own writing within the latter. Nearly all later analytic philosophers would follow suit in seeking

[44] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 24.
[45] Wittgenstein quoted and translated by R. Rhees in 'Correspondence and comment', *Human World*, 15–16 (May–August 1974), 156.
[46] See I. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings in Philosophy and Literature*, ed. P. Conradi (London: Penguin, 1999).
[47] Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. 35.

the mathematically inspired ideal of a language and style trimmed of all excess ('never use a long word if a shorter one will do').[48] As the philosopher Lawrence Hinman describes in an article on analytic style, it is as though, 'if one could arrive at a perfectly clear expression of one's position, it would be expressed in purely informative language and such expression would be a-stylistic'.[49] The suspicion is that style is something inessential that colours and potentially obscures thought.[50]

A view of language purged of excess is also present in Gottlob Frege, who refers to the 'connotative or metaphorical' aspect of language as 'colouring and shading'.[51] 'It makes no difference to the thought whether I use the word "horse" or "steed" or "nag" or "prad". The assertoric force does not cover the ways in which these words differ. What is called mood, atmosphere, illumination in a poem, what is portrayed by intonation and rhythm, does not belong to the thought', he writes.[52] Frege does not suggest that the difference between nag and steed fails to matter in *any* context, but that for a logical analysis, one that underpins the analytic project, the difference is insignificant. Thought and expression are treated as separate entities. Ayer makes similar claims to those found in Frege and Russell, dividing language into 'scientific' and 'emotive' uses, for which 'the one is primarily concerned with the expression of true propositions, the other with the creation of a work of art. Thus, if a work of science contains true and important propositions, its value as a work of science will hardly be diminished by the fact that they are inelegantly expressed.'[53] Philosophy, within this schema, falls on the side of the scientific, shaping its language use and style according to the imperative to 'express true propositions'.

Russell jokes that he is 'allowed to use plain English because everybody knows I could use mathematical logic if I chose', and winkingly recommends that everyone's first philosophical work 'should be written in a jargon only to be understood by the erudite few' (as in his own *Principia*) so that 'they can ever after say what they have to say in a language "understanded of the people"'.[54] This implicit jibe at his own philosophical writings suggests the

[48] Ibid., p. 37. [49] Hinman, 'Philosophy and style', 513.
[50] For more on Russell's attitude towards style, see DasGupta, 'Russell as a man of letters', 7–9.
[51] J. Bremer, '"An artistic rather than a scientific achievement": Frege and the poeticality of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', *Philosophia*, 49:1 (2021), 183.
[52] G. Frege, 'On concept and object' (1892) in M. Beaney (ed.), *The Frege Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 184.
[53] Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 28.
[54] Russell, *Basic Writings*, p. 37. Russell alludes to the twenty-fourth of the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican Church.

division in Russell's mind between them and his more popular writings, between the properly philosophical mathematical logic and the 'plain English' essays with their republican ideal of educating the public. To build on his allusion, the one recalls institutional Catholicism with its whiff of mystery, while the other is thoroughly Protestant, even Puritan, and hence *English* and straightforward.[55] Of course, no one would dispute that mathematical-logical notation differs from discursive writing, and mathematicians and logicians nearly always publish what Frege called 'elucidations', to explain what logical systems rely on but cannot be admitted into the system itself.[56] But Russell's narrow understanding of philosophy does not allow him to see the continuity across his writings, nor does it allow him to see the cultivation of 'plain English' with minimal 'embellishment' as a philosophical gesture in itself, one that (as he notes at the beginning of 'How I Write') takes its cue from mathematics and logic, or what Ayer calls 'scientific' language.

The general lack of reflection about what it means to write philosophy mathematically or scientifically, and about what counts as 'clarity' and 'precision', goes hand in hand with the tendency to see aesthetic considerations as the concern of literature rather than philosophy. This, in turn, contributes to certain philosophical blind spots within the analytic tradition. This effect has been intensified by the professionalisation or institutionalisation of philosophy over the course of the twentieth century, along with an increased drive toward specialisation (and narrow, specialised debates) within academic disciplines. Wittgenstein's famous *Tractatus* fragment 107 is an apt characterisation of the style of analytic argumentation: 'We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction, and so, in a certain sense, the conditions are ideal; but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk.'[57] He diagnoses this condition elsewhere as a 'loss of problems', when everything appears so simple and unambiguous that 'no deep problems seem to exist any more, the world becomes broad and flat and loses all depth, and what they write becomes immeasurably shallow and trivial. Russell and H.G. Wells suffer from this.'[58] This has as much to do with the way that

[55] One can also see Russell as an inheritor of the Puritanical plain style of the seventeenth century, which distanced itself from the perceived rhetorical excesses of the Anglican royalists.

[56] Bremer, 'An artistic rather than a scientific achievement', 186.

[57] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P. Hacker, and J. Schulte, revised 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 51 (fragment 107).

[58] Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, p. 8.

philosophy is written (Lukács calls it 'icy perfection') as it does with the content of analytic arguments.[59] The mathematical virtues of simplicity and economy, when taken to the extreme, risk clarifying thought to the point that it is philosophically dishonest. Experience is rarely simple and economical, and though one of the aims of philosophy is the clarification of experience, one can easily be tempted by method to end up abstracted far from what one sets out to understand.

The analytic understanding of philosophy's remit as 'expressing true propositions' creates a problem for the essay as a philosophical vehicle, since it tends to exclude considerations of the lived environment within which precise, philosophical uses of language become possible. This leads to a tendency to become locked within one's own subjective constructions, since they are not recognised as such. Wittgenstein's posthumous work, *Philosophical Investigations*, was published in 1953, upsetting the entire project of analytic philosophy up to that point with its suggestion that philosophical inquiry was shaped by 'forms of life', and specifically that intersubjective agreement, rather than a neutral and objective reason, determined meaningful uses of language. Wittgenstein's recognition of the pre-philosophical lifeworld as a matter of philosophical concern broke new ground in the analytic tradition; indeed, it was so radically different from what had come before that many analytic philosophers did not and still do not accept 'late Wittgenstein' into their ranks, and only with caveats accept his earlier *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's careful attention to style in both works has been a frequent source of misunderstanding. In 1955, J.L. Austin introduced the notion of the performativity of language, a contrast to the emphasis on propositions in the philosophy of language of Frege, Russell, and Ayer. The idea that language *does* things other than convey propositional truth, that it can be an exercise of power, added to Wittgenstein's insights about the relationship between language and forms of life, and opened up space for a new generation of philosophers, often outside of analytic philosophy, to reflect on what their philosophical texts were doing and on the ethics of philosophical writing – of which Judith Butler, the target of Nussbaum's scathing critique about obscurantism, is one prominent example.

Within analytic philosophy, the 'ordinary language' school that followed from Austin's work had more affinity with the Montaignian tradition than with the Baconian–Lockean drive towards systematic, 'demonstrative truths'.

[59] Lukács, 'On the nature and form', p. 2.

Stanley Cavell's essays reflect this Montaignian strand in analytic writing, though in the distinctly American idiom of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Cavell's essays are characterised by long, parenthetically qualified sentences that proliferate meanings rather than narrowing and simplifying them. Instead of tackling a predefined set of philosophical problems, Cavell pays heed to the phenomenological and social conditions within which philosophical thinking takes place, or to, as he calls them, 'the human conditions of knowledge and thought'.[60] This focus leads to a much more stylistically self-conscious writing, since being-in-language is one of the factors that shapes human understanding and so also shapes philosophical inquiry. Our style stands in for a certain positioning vis-à-vis the world.

Despite these notable exceptions, the Baconian–Lockean roots of analytic philosophy still dominate the tradition, with its effort towards systematic understanding and an economy of knowledge, defined in advance by a set of philosophical problems that are pursued within specialised sub-fields. Nussbaum, who spared no punches in her criticism of 'obscure' writing, is equally scathing and unequivocal in her assessment of the analytic tradition as 'a style correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid, a style that seemed to be regarded as an all-purpose solvent in which philosophical issues of any kind at all could be efficiently disentangled'.[61] She notes that 'there might be other ways of being precise, other conceptions of lucidity and completeness', but argues that the lack of awareness of stylistic issues prevents such questions from being raised and so blocks access to vital philosophical questions and insights. On this we agree. Analytic philosophers are still writing 'essays', insofar as the term 'essay' has become a generic descriptor for the 'articles' or 'papers' that are published in academic journals. Yet the form is in most cases unconsciously adopted and not intrinsically related to what is being argued; it is thereby drained of its potential, *qua* essay, of philosophical discovery and surprise.

[60] S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 216.

[61] M. Nussbaum, 'The "ancient quarrel": literature and moral philosophy' in S.K. George (ed.), *Ethics, Literature, and Theory: An Introductory Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 148.

PART IV

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FRACTURED SELVES, FRAGMENTED WORLDS

29

The Preface Essay

MARIO AQUILINA

Had it been printed in another context, this chapter on the 'preface essay' might have been preceded by a preface. Such a preface could have been written in a personal voice and provided readers with the circumstances that determined the writing of the chapter. It could have referred to discussions with the editors, and it could have justified some of the chapter's specific characteristics, including its style, structure, content, choices, and omissions. It could have been written after but placed before the chapter in its final form, and it could have been dated, signed in the author's name, and given a title. Such a title might have been, simply, 'Preface' but also possibly 'Foreword', though the latter is typically used when a preface is written by someone other than the author of the work. But the opening paragraphs of this chapter cannot and are not meant to be a preface. The generic conventions of the volume in which the chapter is published mean that any playful self-reflexivity of the opening gambit has to conform to what is typically expected of an introduction: a presentation of the chapter's argument and a more or less systematic summary of its content, which I now intend to deliver.

Like a preface, a title helps to frame a work, and as my title suggests, this chapter will attempt to define the 'preface essay'. I proceed under the assumption that the prefatorial and the essayistic are related but distinct modes of writing. Not all prefaces are essays, but many prefaces are written in the form of an essay or have essayistic qualities. Different kinds of prefaces will be invoked in this chapter, but prefaces that are also essays are its subject. More specifically, I will focus on what Gérard Genette calls 'the preface par excellence', namely, the 'original authorial preface'[1] written by an author, in their own name, and placed before the work to '*ensure that the text*

[1] G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. J.E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 196.

is read properly'.[2] While those preface essays written to precede *other* writers' work have many of the same characteristics as authorial preface essays, they also raise questions this chapter does not have space to consider, such as, for example, the relation between literary criticism and the essay.[3] Instead, with reference to existing theories of the preface, as well as important examples of the preface as essay by authors ranging from John Dryden to William Wordsworth, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Zadie Smith, this chapter will provide a conceptual framework for the preface essay and explain its generic characteristics.

Preface essays are typically written to contextualise, justify, and introduce another text or body of work; however, to the extent that they liberate themselves from those texts and stand on their own, they invite us to read them as not simply supplementary to or dependent on the works they preface. I will identify some of the characteristics of prefatorial texts that make them worthy of anthologisation and critical analysis. I will argue that preface essays are hybrid texts that combine prefatorial with essayistic qualities that contribute to their literary value. These qualities include the self-reflexivity of authors who might use the preface essay as a space for crafting or refining an authorial self and the movement from the specificity of time and space to a consideration of ideas in a more atemporal and ahistorical manner.

Theories and Definitions of the Preface

We can begin to understand in more detail what preface essays are through John Dryden's preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700). This book of translations of classical and medieval poetry includes some of Dryden's own original work, and its preface is widely considered to be one of the finest critical essays in the history of English literature. Dryden's preface evaluates and compares Ovid, Virgil, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Geoffrey Chaucer, positing the latter as the 'Father of *English* poetry'.[4] It exemplifies the hybrid characteristics of the preface essay by introducing, contextualising, and

[2] Ibid., p. 197.

[3] For a discussion of this subject, see J. Sider Jost's 'The art of criticism: essay as citation' in this volume (Ch. 9).

[4] J. Dryden, *The Preface to the Fables*, ed. W.H. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 11. For more on Dryden's preface essays, particularly in relation to the tradition of British criticism, see Sider Jost, 'The art of criticism: essay as citation', in this volume.

justifying Dryden's own work to the reader, as a preface might do, while also becoming itself a canonical example of literary criticism. As a critic, Dryden offers the reader evaluative judgments of the work of others – in this case, Chaucer. However, since he is also writing a preface to his own translations of other writers' works, he feels the need to justify himself for including Chaucer. Dryden is conscious of 'Enemies' who 'are so far from granting [him, Dryden] to be a good Poet that they will not allow [him] so much as to be a Christian, or a Moral Man'.[5] He anticipates and counters possible objections that might arrive from his adversaries, and he claims that he is not willing to defend the 'Profaneness' in Chaucer, and actually 'disown[s] it'.[6] Some of Chaucer's characters are 'Vicious', he concedes, some 'Vertuous'; 'some are unlearn'd, or ... Lewd, and some are Learn'd', but in selecting which tales to translate,[7] Dryden claims he has tried to steer away from those that, due to the immorality of their speakers or subjects, include 'obscene Words' and other indecent matter.[8] This means tales too 'undecent to be heard' have been 'left untold'.[9] Dryden's preface essay therefore combines aspects of the essay – more precisely, the evaluative and explicatory functions of the critical essay – with functions that belong to the preface, such as justifying the author's decisions in ways that construct a desirable image of them for the reader.

However, not all prefaces are essayistic. Introducing his anthology of prefaces, *The Book of Prefaces* (2000), Alasdair Gray gives his own criterion for his selection of texts: 'By preface I mean any beginning entitled Preface, Prologue, Proheme, Introduction, Introductory, Apology, Design, Foreword or Advertisement, and a few opening lines or paragraphs which are not labelled but prepare the reader for the following without being essential to it.'[10] Gray's wide casting of the net sidesteps distinctions like those between an introduction and a preface, and it leads to a definition of the preface that includes works as different as the poem 'Genesis' (c. 675 ce) attributed to Bede, the opening verses of the morality play 'Everyman' (c. 1515), the extended title of Raphael Holinshed's *The Historie of England, from the time that it was first inhabited, vntill the time that it was last conquered* (1587), the verse prologue in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), John Florio's address 'To the Courteous Reader' prefacing his translations of

[5] Dryden, *Preface*, p. 16. [6] Ibid. [7] Ibid., p. 15. [8] Ibid., p. 17. [9] Ibid.
[10] A. Gray, 'An editor's advertisement' in *The Book of Prefaces: A Short History of Literate Thought in Words by Great Writers of Four Nations from the 7th to the 20th Century*, ed. Gray (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 7.

Montaigne's essays (1603), a fictional preface in the voice of the narrator in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), the dedication to Mr Pitt in the first volume of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760), prefaces by the poets William Wordsworth, John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley introducing and commenting on their poetry, and by novelists like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Thomas Hardy, and the preface to Matthew Arnold's *Mixed Essays* (1879), which is a book that includes essays originally published as prefaces. While Gray uses the terms 'prefaces' and 'preface essays' interchangeably, it would be a stretch to think of all such prefatorial texts – including titles and advertisements – as 'preface essays' in the way I am defining the term.[11]

Theoretical works on the preface are rare, and texts that specifically discuss the preface essay even rarer. However, a brief consideration of the main theories of the preface will allow us to identify and distinguish those qualities of the prefatorial and of the essayistic that are central to the preface essay. Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987) contains a comprehensive study of the preface. It offers a useful starting point for any attempt to define the preface because it systematically describes different qualities of prefaces.[12] Genette uses a typology based on a very broad understanding of what counts as a preface: 'I will use the word *preface* to designate every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it.'[13] Genette is aware that fine distinctions can be made among many of these different kinds of texts he discusses in his study of the 'prefatorial situation of communication'.[14] For instance, preludial works are placed *before* the work they preface while postludial works are placed after. Genette uses the terms 'preludial' and 'postludial' to refer to the placing of the introductory piece in relation to the main work rather than to other generic aspects of the 'prelude', such as the way the prelude, especially in music, establishes the mood or themes of a work. Differences between kinds of preface also involve when a preface is written and how many times it is revised for a particular work in subsequent editions of the work. As we shall see, a consideration of the time(s) of writing as well as of the temporal and spatial distance between the work and its preface(s) is distinctive to the preface essay, allowing the author to reflect on and create distance from the main work.

[11] Ibid., p. 9. [12] Genette, *Paratexts*, chs. 8, 9, and 10. [13] Ibid., p. 161. [14] Ibid.

One key distinction Genette makes is between the 'incorporated preface' concealed in a text, such as the opening lines of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and the preface that is separated from the main text by being labelled a 'preface' or 'foreword' and placed before or, occasionally, after the main text in a book.[15] The latter kind of preface becomes dominant with the rise of the book as a printed artefact around the fifteenth century. Arguably, the physical separation in a book of the prefatorial from the main body of the work is crucial for the birth of the preface essay because it facilitates prefaces becoming more readable as stand-alone texts. Yet Genette does not focus on the potential that this separation gave the preface to gain value as a separate text. He sees the differences between different kinds of prefaces as less important than the principal similarities among them, primarily, as discourses that focus on another text or texts as the main work. The main quality of the preface for him is its relational quality. Paratexts, including prefaces, are a kind of 'threshold' or '"undefined zone" between the inside and the outside'.[16] They exist *beside* or *around* the work they preface. Thus, their status as texts is inextricable from the work on whose boundaries they appear.

In a meta-prefatorial essay to his book *Dissemination* (in 1972), Jacques Derrida reflects on the preface's dependence on the work it prefaces. That essay is titled 'Hors livre, préfaces' (playfully rendered by Barbara Johnson as 'Outwork, Hors d' œuvre, Extratext, Foreplay, Bookend, Facing, Prefacing'). Derrida begins by suggesting that prefaces are characterised by a series of paradoxes that make them seem supplementary, secondary, and subject to logical impossibilities:

> Prefaces . . . have always been written, it seems, in view of their own self-effacement. Upon reaching the end of the *pre-* (which presents and precedes, or rather forestalls, the representative production and, in order to put before the reader's eyes what is not yet visible, is obliged to speak, predict, and predicate), the route which has been covered must cancel itself out.[17]

Why would one consider the preface worthy of discussion, as in this chapter, if its primary function is to point to something else, namely the work it prefaces? 'Preceding what ought to be able to present itself on its own, the preface falls like an empty husk, a piece of formal refuse', as Derrida puts it.[18] He is here retracing – and deconstructing – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's

[15] Ibid., p. 164. [16] Ibid., p. 2.
[17] J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 9. [18] Ibid.

dismissal of the preface in his own preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In the following passage from that preface, Hegel provides a definition of the preface while also explaining why it is not needed for philosophy:

> It is customary to preface a work with an explanation of the author's aim, why he wrote the book, and the relationship in which he believes it to stand to other earlier or contemporary treatises on the same subject. In the case of a philosophical work, however, such an explanation seems not only superfluous but, in view of the nature of the subject-matter, even inappropriate and misleading.[19]

The problem, for Hegel, is that 'philosophical truth' should not be subject to the 'historical *statement*' that a preface makes in contextualising the text that follows. Rather, it should 'move . . . essentially in the element of universality'.[20] In other words, for Hegel, the preface is both unnecessary and impossible in its relation to philosophy.

Derrida deconstructs Hegel's position in various ways. *Dissemination* is itself a book of philosophy (meaning, in Hegel's terms, that it is not supposed to require a preface), and in his preface to it Derrida begins the philosophical work that the rest of the work continues. Hegel himself, in his preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, has already begun the philosophical thinking that supposedly does not require contextualisation. Derrida's point – delivered through a preface about prefacing in the form of philosophy that deconstructs Hegel's own philosophy of the preface – is that prefaces are an inextricable part of the philosophical work they precede. Hegel might want to present philosophy as complete in itself, and hence not requiring a preface, but his own work shows how philosophy depends on a prefatorial presentation of itself as philosophy.

Genette and Derrida help us to reflect on how a preface and the work it prefaces frame each other in ways that determine how they are both read, and how the prefatorial lives on through the work it prefaces. However, another kind of afterlife or durability is crucial to the preface essay: the ability of the preface to detach itself from and live *beyond* the work it prefaces. A preface essay might well have originally been written about the work it prefaces, but it often also accrues a value separate from that work. In this respect, the preface essay exceeds its dependence on the work it was written to precede. Derrida observes that the preface differs from the introduction in

[19] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 1.
[20] Ibid.

that the latter 'has a more systematic, less historical, less circumstantial link with the logic of the book'.[21] The introduction is '*unique*' in the sense that it does not change in different editions. It deals with 'general and essential architectonic problems' in the work, having as its main function to present 'the general concept'. The preface, on the other hand, can proliferate into multiple versions of itself 'from edition to edition', gaining 'a more empirical historicity' arising from the time and space in which the book is published or republished. Unlike an introduction, the preface essay 'obey[s] an occasional necessity'.[22] It relates to the work it prefaces, but often changes according to circumstances while the work itself remains unchanged. At times, it escapes necessity altogether by appearing as an independent essay outside the context of the book it was intended to preface.

Preface-Essaying the Authorial Self

What, then, are the essayistic characteristics of the 'preface essay'? First, it allows an author to assert authority over a work. It might acknowledge the help of others, apologise for or justify some aspects of the work, explain and contextualise it, dedicate it to someone, pre-empt or respond to criticism by critics or adversaries, or subvert accepted ideas about the genre of the work. The author, in the act of writing, stakes his or her claim to the work and attempts to influence how readers will read or consume it. Second, the preface essay typically performs an act of self-definition, or the crafting of an authorial self. The idea of the essay as a self-reflexive 'attempt' has been definitional of the genre of the essay at least since Montaigne, and the preface essay exhibits an analogous sense of the authorial mind in the process of coming to terms with itself.

In addition, irrespective of tone, content, or rhetorical strategies, the preface essay works to establish a relationship not only to the work being prefaced, but also between its crafted authorial self and the reader. This effort can be seen, for instance, in Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), which he expanded for the third edition of 1802. Although *Lyrical Ballads* was a collaborative project with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth assumes sole authorship of its famous preface essay:

> I hope . . . the Reader will not censure me for attempting to state what I have proposed to myself to perform; and also, (as far as the limits of a preface will

[21] Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 17. [22] Ibid.

> permit) to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose: that at least he may be spared any unpleasant feeling of disappointment, and that I myself may be protected from the most dishonorable accusation which can be brought against an Author, namely, that of an indolence which prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty, or, when his duty is ascertained, prevents him from performing it.[23]

Here and elsewhere, Wordsworth refines his sense of what kind of poet he is or aspires to be through an engagement with his own work and with his readers, in this case by explicating the intentions behind his poetry. As a manifesto for experimental poetry, Wordsworth's preface justifies his use of 'incidents and situations from common life',[24] explains his rationale for the language and style of 'lyrical ballads', and elucidates a theory of poetry as the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . recollected in tranquillity'.[25] In the 1802 version of the preface, Wordsworth goes on to define the 'character of a Poet', but his critical observations are rooted in his own self-presentation as a philosophical poet, a character or figure that Coleridge has helped him define but that he appropriates for himself in the essayistic voice of the preface.[26]

Wordsworth's preface not only tells the reader what 'genuine' poetry is, as a literary critic or theorist might do, or what it should be, as the author of a manifesto might do, but also the conditions that allow him to assume the 'right to the name of a Poet'.[27] His preface is an act of self-definition, a prefatory signature in the sense of that which authenticates and identifies something as one's own, an introduction not of the work but of himself to the reader, and a presentation of the frames of judgment the reader should apply in appraising his worth and importance. He begins by warning his reader not to censure him 'for not having performed what [he] never attempted',[28] and he concludes by asking the reader to judge whether the attempt was worthwhile:

> From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I have proposed to myself: he will determine how far I have attained this object; and, what is a much more

[23] W. Wordsworth, 'Wordsworth's prefaces of 1800 and 1802' in W. Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 235.
[24] Ibid., p. 236. [25] Ibid., p. 237. [26] Ibid., p. 247. [27] Ibid., p. 237.
[28] Ibid., p. 240.

> important question, whether it be worth attaining: and upon the decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the public.[29]

While the preface essay is grounded in the real person of the author, it would be simplistic to assume that the 'I' of the author and the 'I' of the preface essayist are one and the same. Throughout his *Essais*, Montaigne thinks of his essays as extensions of himself, and he makes honesty and sincerity their key selling points. At the same time, he admits that he will only reveal himself to the extent that he chooses or 'dare[s]' to do so. For Montaigne and his followers in the essay tradition, the authorial voice of the essayist is always, to some extent, a form of self-fashioning.[30] Charles Lamb recognised this with regard to William Hazlitt's essays: 'this assumption of character', he says, 'if it be not truly (as we are inclined to believe) his own, is that which gives force to his life & writing'.[31] Even if we do not go to the extent of fully accepting Hazlitt's essayistic character as himself and question what Philippe Lejeune calls the 'autobiographical pact' the essayist makes with his reader, we nevertheless recognise the sense that we are listening to a real-life essayist.[32]

Like other literary essays, the preface essay is dependent on this rhetorical transaction and will often dwell on the historical context from which the author's work arises and, just as often, include a moment in which the author reflects on their accomplishment in that same work. Henry James's prefaces to his novels, which he wrote to accompany the New York editions of his previously published works, are a fine example of this. In a preface essay attached to the 1907 edition of *Roderick Hudson*, he remarks that 'these notes represent, over a considerable course, the continuity of an artist's endeavour, the growth of his whole operative consciousness and, best of all, perhaps, their own tendency to multiply, with the implication, thereby, of a memory much enriched'.[33] Here and elsewhere, James's prefaces illustrate the author's thought behind his work both at the moment of composition and

[29] Ibid., p. 258.
[30] M. Montaigne, 'Of repentance' in D.M. Frame (ed.), *The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 611.
[31] C. Lamb, 'Unpublished review of Hazlitt's *Table Talk*' in R. Park (ed.), *Lamb as Critic* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 303.
[32] P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. P.J. Eakin, trans. K. Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
[33] H. James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, intro. R.P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 4.

in retrospect, at the moment of writing the prefaces, which in James's case sometimes came years after writing the work.

In their self-reflexive analysis and evaluation of the authorial self, James's preface essays are markedly essayistic. 'I not only recover with ease, but I delight to recall, the first impulse given to the idea of "The Aspern Papers"', he writes in a preface to the novella.[34] He goes on to detail the situations and discoveries that led to the ideas behind the work: 'I got wind of my positive fact, I followed the scent. It was in Florence years ago; which is precisely, of the whole matter, what I like most to remember.'[35] He recounts how he discovered, years after the fact, that 'Claire Clairmont, the half-sister of Mary Godwin, Shelley's second wife, and for a while the intimate friend of Byron and the mother of his daughter Allegra' was living in Florence at a time when he himself lived there. He also reflects on the fact that 'an ardent Shelleyite ... was named to [him] as having made interest with Miss Clairmont to be accepted as a lodger on the calculation that she would have Shelley documents'.[36] He speaks of the way he adapted these ideas in *The Aspern Papers* of 1888 (changing Florence to Venice and Shelley to Aspern) and also, significantly, of how his not having been aware of Clairmont's being in Florence and hence his not having been tempted to meet her made the work possible.

The distance between James as a person and the anecdotes he later encountered allowed him to explore the romantic feelings that would otherwise have been dampened by actual, real-life encounters. His preface essay thus explores the role of his personal and historical circumstances in the creation of *The Aspern Papers* and speculates on their necessity with regard to the work. Yet recounting the historical story of origins is not the only concern in this preface essay that, read carefully, also reveals James's essayistic self-reflective thought in action as he deals with changes in his thinking over the years through to the time of writing the preface:

> So it is at any rate, fairly in too thick and rich a retrospect, that I see my old Venice of 'The Aspern Papers,' that I see the still earlier one of Jeffrey Aspern himself, and that I see even the comparatively recent Florence that was to drop into my ear the solicitation of these things .... I have had occasion in the course of these remarks to define my sense of the romantic, and am glad to encounter again here an instance of that virtue as I understand it.[37]

[34] Ibid., p. 159. [35] Ibid. [36] Ibid., pp. 162–3. [37] Ibid., p. 161.

Historical periods – real and imaginary – as well as moments in the life of an authorial self (the moment of inspiration, of writing the novella, and of writing the preface) overlap and clash in essayistic ways that might remind us of essays like E.B. White's 'Once More to the Lake' (1941) or Virginia Woolf's 'Street Haunting' (1927), which reflect on the different temporalities, historical or subjective, in which the essayist emerges and dissolves as a self.

From Particular to Abstract

A contemporary preface essay that does this work of self-crafting is the 'Foreword' to Zadie Smith's *Feel Free: Essays* (2018). Smith uses her preface to outline her reaction to an old friend's having told her, during a dinner in Rome, that her 'writing so far has been a fifteen-year psychodrama'.[38] Responding to this comment, she begins by renouncing authority over her reader: 'Essays about one person's affective experience have, by their very nature, not a leg to stand on. All they have is their freedom. And the reader is likewise unusually free, because I have absolutely nothing over her, no authority.'[39] As she reflects on her relationship to the reader, Smith turns her preface or 'foreword' into an act of self-definition that rewrites and reclaims authority:

> Writing exists (for me) at the intersection of three precarious, uncertain elements: language, the world, the self. The first is never wholly mine; the second I can only ever know in a partial sense; the third is a malleable and improvised response to the previous two. . . . It's *this* self – whose boundaries are uncertain, whose language is never pure, whose world is in no way 'self-evident' – that I try to write from and to.[40]

This act of self-definition is also, as in Wordsworth's preface, an attempt at constructing or determining the reader's experience. Smith writes: 'My hope is for a reader who, like the author, often wonders how free she really is, and who takes it for granted that reading involves all the same liberties and exigencies as writing.'[41] Such a stated awareness of the reader, and the invitation to that reader to reflect with the writer about something specific – in this case, acts of writing and reading – constitute other essayistic qualities, not only of Smith's preface but of the preface essay more generally.[42]

[38] Z. Smith, *Feel Free: Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), p. xi. [39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., pp. xi–xii. [41] Ibid., p. xii.
[42] For a discussion of the relation between the 'I' and the 'other' or essayist and reader, see M. Aquilina, 'Affinities and contestations: the self and the other in the essay' in

The literary essay is, more often than not, conversational not only in the sense of adopting a voice that is personal and familiar but also in its positing of the reader as intrinsic to the rhetorical dynamics and thought processes of the essay. Nonetheless, while the reader is interpellated in the preface essay, that essay (like others) remains firmly tied to authorial signing or appropriation. Smith's claim for ownership of this work, a collection of essays, is guaranteed not only by the prefatory signature ('Zadie Smith | New York | 18 January 2017') but, more importantly, by Smith's essayistic reflections on those specificities of time and place: 'These essays you have in your hands were written in England and America during the eight years of the Obama presidency and so are the product of a bygone world . . . . you can't fight for a freedom you've forgotten to identify. To the reader still curious about freedom I offer these essays.'[43] Smith's foreword exemplifies the preface essay's tendency to begin or end (sometimes both) in the specificity of time *and* place as well as the author's peculiar relation to them.

Like the literary essay, however, the preface essay will often depart from the specific – the particular, the historical – in an attempt to broach wider, more abstract issues. Smith shows some reticence in her parenthetical qualification of the theoretical assertion that 'Writing exists (for me) at the intersection of three precarious, uncertain elements: language, the world, the self.'[44] However, it is precisely this essayistic movement from the occasional and specific towards generalisation, abstraction, and commentary that characterises the preface essay – and it is also most likely to create the conditions for its living on separately from the work it prefaces. Wordsworth's preface is not just about the poems of *Lyrical Ballads* but also a theoretical treatise on poetry. James's prefaces detail the author's own creative process while often reflecting upon the topic more generally. He conceived his prefaces, in their totality, not only as a record of his intentions in fiction but also as 'a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation'.[45] As Richard Blackmur puts it, James's prefaces 'added up to a fairly exhaustive reference book on the technical aspects of the art of fiction'.[46] The same might be said of Wordsworth's preface essay with regard to poetry. A preface essay not only shows the writer performing self-reflexive essayistic thinking but also,

M. Aquilina, B. Cowser, Jr., and N.B. Wallack (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp. 17–36.

[43] Smith, *Feel Free*, p. xii. [44] Ibid., p. xi.

[45] H. James to W.D. Howells, 17 August 1908, quoted in Blackmur's Introduction to James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. viii.

[46] Blackmur, Introduction to James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. viii.

crucially, loosens its dependence on the work prefaced by departing from historical specificity into a philosophical consideration of wider issues.

The idea of detaching oneself from the work to move towards something different is how Joseph Conrad presents *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) in his preface to the 1914 edition. In a prefatory note titled 'To My Readers in America', he speaks of a 'Suppressed Preface', one he wrote in 1897 but that 'on advice . . . was never published with the book', though it did appear as an 'afterword' to the last instalment of the serialised publication of the novel in *The New Review*.[47] Conrad confesses that the original preface was written 'in the revulsion of feeling before the accomplished task'.[48] At the moment of writing *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, he felt that he 'had done with the sea, and that henceforth [he] had to be a writer', and so that suppressed preface essay attempted to 'express the spirit in which [he] was entering on the task of [his] new life'.[49] The insertion of the 1914 preface, which could easily have been called an 'afterword', highlights the temporal and spatial complexity around prefatorial writing; it appears as a note placed before the 'Suppressed Preface', which, in that edition, precedes rather than follows the novel. In his 1914 prefatory note, Conrad looks back at the suppressed preface that follows it spatially in the publication, a preface that had been written to announce a departure from a certain kind of work (sea novels in the style of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*), which that preface was, ironically, meant to introduce to the reader.[50]

This essayistic departure from the historic specificity, or occasionality, of the preface can also be seen in the ways in which Conrad's preface essay becomes a manifesto for literary impressionism. As is customary in other prefaces, Conrad contextualises his work for the reader in order to influence the way his work will be read:

> My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand – and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.[51]

This address to the reader is framed within the development of a theory of art, or more specifically of the novel as art, and makes claims that go well

[47] J. Conrad, 'To my readers in America' in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, ed. C. Watts (London: Penguin, 1989), p. xlvi.
[48] Ibid., p. xlv. [49] Ibid. [50] Ibid., p. xlvi. [51] Ibid., p. xlix.

beyond the specific significance of the novel it prefaces: 'A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect.'[52] From the 'I' of the author, we move to a more abstract consideration of 'art', 'justice', 'truth' and that which is 'fundamental . . . enduring and essential'.[53]

As many theorists of the essay have noted, the form largely depends on a fundamental occasionality or dependence on a specific subject that is the occasion of writing. Quoting Montaigne's 'Of Idleness', Kathryn Murphy characterises the essay as 'a technique of bridling the runaway horse of the mind with a "definite subject," limiting the "vague field of the imagination"'.[54] She argues that the prevalent use of 'on' and 'of' in essay titles suggests that 'the essay presents us with something to which it seems to want to draw attention'.[55] The essay thus presumes to be about something, but as Murphy notes, it is actually the departure from this initial restriction or focus that characterises the essay. The essay will digress from its subject. The essay will show us the object it is about as well as 'the pointing finger, and the person pointing'.[56] The essay needs its subject, but 'it is often strangely uninterested in it', so we might say that the preposition 'on' is at least as important as any word that might follow it.[57]

If we associate the preposition 'on' with the essay, the preposition 'to' is definitional of the preface, and the prefatorial. Samuel Johnson's 1765 'Preface to Shakespeare', like Wordsworth's 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', state this explicitly. The object that occasions the preface essay is the work it prefaces, but I here propose that the preface essay does more than relate *to* that work. Indeed, the work provides the essayist with a prefatory space for self-crafting. The preface essay oscillates between the work it is linked '*to*' as a preface and the essayistic '*on*' which implies departure from specificity towards something of wider or more universal significance. It is in that oscillation that the preface becomes essayistic. The preface essay, in pointing not only to what comes after it but also at itself pointing, stakes a claim to its own place in literary history.

[52] Ibid., p. xlvii. [53] Ibid.
[54] K. Murphy, 'On on: the essay as prepositionality', *ASAP Journal* (16 May 2022), https://asapjournal.com/the-contemporary-essay-on-on-the-essay-as-prepositionality-kathryn-murphy/ (accessed 19 July 2023).
[55] Ibid. [56] Ibid. [57] Ibid.

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A Brief History of Travel and the Essay

BARBARA SCHAFF

Travel writing and the essay share a history of classificatory challenges and taxonomic ambivalences. Generations of scholars have remarked on the generic hybridity, the notoriously protean nature, and the elusive heterogeneity of both genres, which often make it difficult to draw demarcation lines against other genres. Travel writing is used as a topical header for what in fact is a formally very diverse corpus, including letters, memoirs, journals, diaries, or reports, which often are very closely related to the essay format. If their formal attributes are nothing but slippery and diverse, their subject matter is equally distinguished by a thematic generosity that often allows for the treatment of the most outlandish topics, from Michel de Montaigne's 'Monstrous Child' to George Orwell's 'Common Toad'. In addition to this formal and discursive indeterminacy, there are other characteristics that connect travel writing and the essay more closely. Both genres are firmly rooted in the empirical tradition, pursuing a search for knowledge that relies on the Lockean notion that knowledge is legitimised through empirical interaction with the world. The subjective experience and personal presence – of the traveller, of the travel essayist – is one of the travel essay's stylistic key features.

As there is no piece of travel writing without an observing, experiencing, self-examining, and commenting persona, there is also no essay without a – to varying degrees – conversational, opinionated and often polemical authorial subject who engages the reader in a quasi-dialogic relationship. This analogous construction of a distinct authorial subject is especially obvious in epistolary travel writing. It is often nearly impossible to differentiate between the travel letter and the travel essay, as both share the performative aspect of the travelling self as well as the provisionality and spontaneity of the narrative account. Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), consisting of fifty-two letters to fifteen recipients, demonstrates the performative versatility of a writer whose register, style, and topics are always customised according to their addressees. The fact that the letters had been

meant for publication from the beginning adds to their carefully edited and essayistic look. Similarly, the epistolary format of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) allows for the focus on a self that swiftly changes from sentimental or picturesque traveller to social observer and commentator.

Finally, mobility as a philosophical or aesthetic experience, as an intellectual journey into the unknown, has been at the heart of the essay from Montaigne's meandering explorations onwards. Charles Forsdick has remarked on the long-standing association of the essay with the peripatetic: 'Far from adhering to a teleological structure, the essay is a discursive form, both rambling and digressive.'[1] Certainly, Samuel Johnson, who published in three essay periodicals including *The Rambler* and *The Adventurer*, was well aware of this trademark. No wonder then that the essay, as a 'perambulation of a series of ideas',[2] a probing intellectual voyage into the unknown, would turn out to be a conducive format for the travel essay.

Changing Attitudes Towards Travel in the Essay

When the modern essay emerged in the sixteenth century, it often drew on new forms of empirical knowledge produced during travels. Sea voyages to new geographical spaces overseas resulted in modern British travel narratives based on detailed observations. Travel became a symbol for active knowledge production, which was to be preferred to dead bookish knowledge. Montaigne set the tone in 1579 in 'Of the Education of Children', claiming that 'travel into foreign countries' was of singular advantage for the traveller, 'to be able chiefly to give an account of the humours, manners, customs, and laws of those nations where he has been'.[3] Montaigne's assessment of travel as a fundamental humanist practice to understand the world, along with Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Travel' (1625), mark the beginning of a reflexive essay tradition that engages with the question of why and how one should travel. Even before the travel essay itself – a format intrinsically connected with the development of the periodical press – became properly established as a major medium for travel writing, this metacritical essay tradition about

[1] C. Forsdick, '*De la plume comme des pieds*: the essay as a peripatetic genre' in C. Forsdick and A. Stafford (eds.), *The Modern Essay in French: Movement, Instability and Performance* (Oxford: P. Lang, 2005), p. 46.

[2] Ibid.

[3] M. Montaigne, 'Of the education of children', *The Essays of Michel Seigneur de Montaigne* (London: A. Murray & Son, 1870), p. 97.

travel evolved as a running commentary on the social functions, intellectual uses, pleasures, and disappointments of travel. For more than four centuries, writers would contribute essential rationales for travel, reflecting on modes of mobility, travel practices, or destinations near and far.

Bacon's essay 'Of Travel' is, like Montaigne's, primarily pedagogical. It originates in a social and cultural context in which travelling is essentially connected with the education of a young gentleman's mind and character. The travel paradigm connected with such educational purposes was the Grand Tour, in the words of James Buzard, 'an ideological exercise . . . to round out the education of young men of the ruling classes by exposing them to the treasured artifacts and ennobling society of the Continent'.[4] In terse prose, Bacon develops a prescriptive catalogue of the dos and don'ts of travelling. The young man needs to prepare well before the journey, he should ideally travel with an experienced and knowledgeable tutor, he should keep a diary during the journey, he should immerse himself in the unknown, and, after his return, he should build on his experiences abroad: 'When a traveller returneth home, let him not leave the countries, where he hath travelled, altogether behind him; but . . . prick in some flowers, of that he hath learned abroad, into the customs of his own country.'[5]

More than 150 years after Bacon's forthright embrace of the educatory benefits of travel, Richard Hurd's polemical essay, *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel Considered as a Part of an English Gentleman's Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Locke* (1764), dampens them. Hurd draws on the philosophical tradition of the Socratic dialogue, in which two parties develop their arguments and counterarguments in the form of a polite conversation, and builds his imaginary dialogue partly on John Locke's reflections on the use of travel for young men developed in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). In a similar vein to Bacon, Locke had regarded the Grand Tour as an eye-opening exercise. Hurd's essay, however, is rooted in a cultural climate witnessing the decline of the aristocratic Grand Tour into a practice often associated with debauchery. Consequently, Hurd was less convinced of the intellectual benefits of travel for young men and has Locke comment on the relation between the traveller and his tutor (which Bacon had put forward as an ideal model of learning) in a rather cynical way: 'The question at present is

[4] J. Buzard, 'The Grand Tour and after (1660–1840)' in P. Hulme and T. Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 38.

[5] F. Bacon, 'Of travel' in J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath (eds.), *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. 6: *Literary and Professional Works 1* (1858; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 418.

of . . . raw, ignorant and ungovernable boys, on the one hand, and of shallow, servile and interested governors, on the other. And if any good can arise from such worthies as these, sauntering within the circle of the Grand Tour, the magic of travelling is much greater than I have any idea of.'[6]

In 1760, Dr Johnson, a reluctant traveller himself, took up Bacon's question concerning what the traveller should bring home from his travels. He devoted an essay in *The Idler* to narratives of travellers and found fault with most of them. Travel writers should abide by the Horatian dictum of 'instruct and please' and tell their readers 'what is done or suffered in distant countries', instead of providing them with superficial descriptions.[7] Johnson concludes his essay with an emphatic appeal to travel writers to contribute something to the universal question of how to live:

> He that would travel for the entertainment of others, should remember that the great object of remark is human life. Every nation has something peculiar in its manufactures, its works of genius, its medicines, its agriculture, its customs and its policy. He only is a useful traveller, who brings home something by which his country may be benefited; who procures some supply of want, or some mitigation of evil, which may enable his readers to compare their condition with that of others, to improve it whenever it is worse, and whenever it is better to enjoy it.[8]

These reflections on the instrumental uses of travel were partly overwritten towards the end of the eighteenth century by the introduction of a new aesthetic paradigm, the picturesque. In his essay 'On Picturesque Travel' (1792), William Gilpin conceptualised a new mode of travel experience in which the distinction between nature and art became obsolete, and the search for picturesque beauty the main stimulus for travel. According to Gilpin, nature, art, and artefacts can all be objects of picturesque travel; the eye of the picturesque traveller looks for a harmonious composition of light and colouring in 'one comprehensive view',[9] blocking out social concerns. However, in travel writing, the exclusionary focus on the aesthetic experience was hardly ever completely accepted. Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland A.D. 1803* (1874), or Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*,

[6] R. Hurd, *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel; Considered as a Part of an English Gentleman's Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Locke* (London: A. Millar, 1764), p. 25.
[7] S. Johnson, *Idler*, no. 97 (23 February 1760) in *The Idler with Additional Essays by Samuel Johnson* (London: J. Catnach, 1800), p. 148.
[8] Ibid., p. 150.
[9] W. Gilpin, 'On picturesque travel' in *Three Essays* (London: R. Blamire, 1794), p. 49.

combine aesthetic awareness of the picturesque paradigm with an astute attentiveness to the social and political situatedness of their journeys.[10]

The metacritical travel essay in the age of picturesque travel discovered walking as a mode of travel that allows for the harmony of physical, spiritual, and intellectual movements. Walking was no longer a form of mobility associated with vagabonds, criminals, and the poor but became a respectable leisure activity. William Hazlitt shifted the focus from travel as a sociable activity to a mode of introspection, and proposed solitary walking. His 'On Going a Journey' (1822) is a programmatic essay for Romantic travel: 'One of the pleasantest things in the world is going on a journey; but I like to do it myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.'[11] This shift of emphasis from the object of travel – the world – to the subjective experience of the traveller paves the way for a series of essays discussing walking as an ideal mode of travel and a spiritual engagement with the world that is favourable to intellectual labour.

In Robert Louis Stevenson's travel essays, travelling became further decoupled from an interest in destinations and was instead theorised as a mode of self-exploration, independence of spirit, and social observation.[12] 'For my part, I travel not to go anywhere but to go. I travel for travel's sake', declared Stevenson in his 1879 *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* – a destination that probably was as uninviting for tourists in 1878 as it is today.[13] In 'El Dorado', first published in 1878 in *The London Magazine*, Stevenson hinted at Sir Walter Raleigh's unsuccessful search for the legendary El Dorado, and declared travel to be an end in itself:

> O unwearied feet, travelling ye know not whither! Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hilltop, and but a little way further, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.[14]

[10] B. Schaff, 'Periods of travel writing' in *Handbook of British Travel Writing*, ed. Schaff (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), p. 17.

[11] W. Hazlitt, 'On going a journey' in R. Gilbert, J. Robinson, and A. Wallace (eds.), *The Walker's Literary Companion* (Halcottsville, NY: Breakaway Books, 2000), p. 151.

[12] B. Schaff, 'Walking books: practices, semantics and mediations of literary walks' in B. Korte and A. Sennefelder (eds.), *Travel, Writing and the Media: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 120.

[13] R.L. Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes and The Amateur Emigrant*, ed. C. MacLachlan (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 35.

[14] R.L. Stevenson, 'El Dorado' in *Essays I: Virginibus Puerisque, and Other Papers*, ed. R.L. Abrahamson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 70.

With Stevenson, the travel essay transformed into fulsome praise of autotelic travel, perhaps not without coincidence at a moment when the age of imperialist exploration was coming to an end. Essays like Stevenson's 'Walking Tours' (1876), Leslie Stephen's 'In Praise of Walking' (1902), Max Beerbohm's 'Going out for a Walk' (1920), Stephen Graham's *A Tramp's Sketches* (1912), and, later, Bruce Chatwin's 'It's a Nomad *Nomad* World' (1970), all agree on the advantages of travelling on foot for intellectual activity, self-exploration, and mental well-being, even if – as is the case with Beerbohm's essay – they perform a tongue-in-cheek denial of the mental benefits of walking.

The nostalgia for a connection with nature and natural locomotion that informs most essays on walking is also noticeable in Joseph Conrad's essay 'Ocean Travel' (1923). Conrad, in the age of steamboat travel, takes a look at the bygone days of sailing ship journeys, reflecting on the elemental sea change engendered by steam-powered travel. Having had a nearly twenty-year-long sailing career in the French and British merchant navies, Conrad was accustomed to being in direct contact with the elements – storms at sea as well as dead calms. This feeling of being at the mercy of the elements made sea travel special, allowing for 'awakened perceptions of nature and men' and the 'intimacy of a settled existence',[15] which Conrad put into sharp contrast with the anonymous, even prison-like existence aboard the great ocean liners. He concludes the essay with an emphatic description of the experience of the 'vast solitude of the sea', deliberately using the register of the sublime:

> almost all, men and women, became reconciled to the vast solitude of the sea untroubled by the sound of the world's mechanical contrivances and the noise of its endless controversies. The silence of the universe would lie very close to the sailing ship, with her freight of lives from which the daily stresses and anxieties had been removed, as if the circle of the horizon had been a magic ring laid on the sea. No doubt the days thus enchanted were empty, but they were not so tedious as people may imagine. They passed quickly, and, if they brought no profit or excitement, I cannot help thinking that they were not wasted. No! They were not wasted.[16]

Søren Frank observes how 'the exclamation mark and the final repetition emphasize the maritime writer's determination to salvage and preserve the

[15] J. Conrad, 'Ocean travel' in *Last Essays*, ed. H.R. Stevens and J.H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 29.
[16] Ibid., p. 29.

dimensions and modes' of air-driven sea travel that modern steamships no longer provide:[17] an onboard community and a magical, seemingly unmediated contact with nature. Conrad's swansong of bygone sailing ship travel as a form of travel that is in the moment, and therefore to be preferred to destination-driven steamboat travel, harks back to Stevenson's formula of travelling for travelling's sake.

In 'It's a Nomad *Nomad* World', first published in *Vogue* magazine in 1970, Chatwin expands the notion of mobility into an all-encompassing theory of nomadism as a healthy utopian alternative to the decadence and diseases of settled civilisations:

> All our activities are linked to the idea of journeys. And I like to think that our brains have an information system giving us orders for the road, and that here lie the mainsprings of our restlessness. At an early stage man found he could spill out all this information in one go, by tampering with the chemistry of the brain. He could fly off on an illusory journey or an imaginary ascent. Consequently, settlers naively identified God with the vine, hashish or a hallucinatory mushroom, but true wanderers rarely fell prey to this illusion. Drugs are vehicles for people who have forgotten how to walk.[18]

Chatwin's essay marks the culmination of a discourse on pedestrian travels, which gradually morphed from the exploration of a mode of transport into a philosophy of the human condition as intrinsically connected to travelling.[19] In *The Art of Travel*, a collection of essays on the philosophy of travel, Alain de Botton discusses the tradition of the spiritual idealisation of travel as a quest for happiness and compares the expectations and motivations for travel with the mundane realities of the actual journey. 'If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness', he writes, 'then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest – in all its ardour and paradoxes – [as] our travels.'[20] Drawing on the narratives and

[17] S. Frank, 'The seven seas: maritime modernity in Nordic fiction' in S.P Sondrup et al. (eds.), *Nordic Literature: A Comparative History*, Vol. 1: *Spatial Nodes* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2017), p. 199.

[18] B. Chatwin, 'It's a nomad *nomad* world' in *Anatomy of Restlessness* (London: Picador, 1996), p. 106.

[19] For scholarly explorations of the history of European peripatetic practices, see M. Marples, *Shanks's Pony: A Study of Walking* (London: J.M. Dent, 1959); A.D. Wallace, *Walking, Literature, and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and R. Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001).

[20] A. de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002), p. 9.

biographies of famous travellers such as Alexander von Humboldt, William Wordsworth, Gustave Flaubert, and artists such as John Ruskin, Edward Hopper, and Vincent Van Gogh, de Botton offers a concluding philosophical and historical analysis of why and how we travel whose starting point is Bacon's aphoristic deliberations. Like their predecessors, de Botton's essays testify to the ongoing and central cultural role of travel as a practice helping us to understand the relation between self and world.

Travel Essays and Periodical Culture

Because there is little critical distinction between travel narratives and the travel essay, the latter has so far garnered little scholarly attention as a genre in its own right. Yet many narratives of journeys are ordered along an axis of episodic events, and much of what was and is published as travel narrative in book form is often a series of essays. But the travel essay as a multivalent, vibrant form emerged with the periodical press. Looking at Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. In the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (1705), one can already spot the future essayist of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The ampersand in the title hints to an essayistic (non-systematic, digressive, impressionistic) account rather than a well-planned travelogue, and the combination of personal observations and performative presentation of his travelling self in writing is, as Peter France has observed, a distinctive trademark of eighteenth-century essay culture.[21]

In the nineteenth century, the travel essay gained momentum in the wake of the expansion of the British Empire and the diversification and technological improvement of the periodical press. 'Although book publications have attracted more attention from scholars and students of travel writing', Bill Bell reminds us, 'it is often forgotten that the largest circulation for travel writing up to the First World War was through the periodical press.'[22] Similarly, Barbara Korte argues that 'Travel and periodical culture were coextensive; both were firmly situated in capitalist economy, and their success as commodities depended on prosperity and leisure time for a growing number of people.'[23] Colonial explorations of Africa and India;

[21] P. France, 'British and French traditions of the essay' in Forsdick and Stafford (eds.), *The Modern Essay in French*, p. 33.

[22] B. Bell, 'The market for travel writing' in Schaff (ed.), *Handbook of British Travel Writing*, p. 134.

[23] B. Korte, 'The media logic of Victorian periodicals: affordances for travel writing' in Korte and Sennefelder (eds.), *Travel, Writing and the Media*, p. 59.

archaeological excavations in the Middle East; ethnographic, cartographic, and geographical investigations on five continents; and touristic journeys in the Old World were all discussed, reviewed, and avidly read about in magazines and periodicals. Anyone with an interest in travel writing would have found ample and diverse material – scientific, humorous, critical, autobiographical – in the form of essayistic travel writing

The importance of information about exploration and travel in foreign lands in the age of British imperialism cannot be overstated. Magazines such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *The Cornhill Magazine* were much invested in Britain's colonial territories. They catered to the reading interests of British citizens abroad and at the same time brought the outer reaches of the empire home to readers on the British Isles. The massive cultural interest in travel writing and the accessibility of the periodical press for writers who were not yet well known or established, resulted in a thematic and stylistic diversity of travel essays unmatched by the more rigid requirements and editing regimes of travel books. Countless travel writers profited from this vibrant, changing, and diverse culture of periodicals. The affordability of periodicals also meant that travel writing was now available for readers who could not afford books. Even if successful series of travel essays would later be published in book form, the difference between book and serial publication should not be underestimated. Periodicals supported an effect of immediacy of experience, and simulated the synchrony between the temporality of the journey and of weekly reading. This turned the reader into almost a traveller's companion, who could share the incidents and events from week to week. Contrasted with the sequential *nacheinander* ('after-one-another') of the periodical essay, the *nebeneinander* ('next-to-one-another') of travel essays collected in books turned the journey into an always-already retrospective experience.[24]

Due to their ephemeral quality, periodical travel series only retained visibility when republished as books. Charles Dickens's 'Travelling Letters Written on the Road', recounting his travels of 1844–5, were first published in *The Daily News* under his editorship from January to March 1846, but achieved canonical status as a book publication that year under the title *Pictures from Italy*. Stevenson published single essays about his journey from

[24] The importance of time and space in literature and art was explored by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his essay 'Laocoon' (1766), which argues that poetry presents things in a sequential order (*nacheinander*) whereas paintings present them next to one another (*nebeneinander*).

Scotland to California in *The New Quarterly Magazine* in 1879–80, while still on the move, and the complete essays appeared posthumously under the title *The Amateur Emigrant* (1895). Isabella Bird, perhaps the most prolific and best-known female Victorian travel writer, also first gained wide recognition in a magazine. Due to her Scottish Presbyterian background, Bird was a good fit with *The Leisure Hour*, a penny weekly magazine that provided edifying Christian literature for a working- to middle-class readership. Bird published several series of travel essays in this magazine, among them 'Pen and Pencil Sketches Among the Outer Hebrides' (1866), 'Australia Felix: Impressions of Victoria and Melbourne' (1877), 'A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains' (1878), and 'Sketches in the Malay Peninsula' (1883), as well as individual travel essays.

Barbara Korte argues that scholarship on travel writing so far has mostly concentrated on up-market book publications (in the case of Bird, John Murray, the most prestigious publisher of travel writing in the Victorian period, published the book versions of her travel narratives). As a result, the paratextual effects of their publication in periodicals remain still largely unexplored. Travel essays were often strikingly illustrated and sat next to travel advertisements, review articles about travel writing, and geological, geographical, anthropological, or political reports.[25] These paratexts complemented the subjective experience of the essay's travelling persona. But not only did readers receive world knowledge from Victorian periodicals as one large intertext, fed from various sources, but travel writers also drew on this vast information network and its existing, often stereotypical, representations of other countries and peoples.

In her study of Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880), Andrea Kaston Tange argues that travel writers often interpreted their own empirical observations through the lens of the cultural stereotypes disseminated in periodicals: 'Bird oscillates between reiterating the fantasies that periodicals cultivated and expressing a desire to represent her experiences accurately. Ultimately, she cannot choose between her competing interpretations of Japan and instead layers them – sometimes with contradictory effects. She thus produces a more nuanced account of Japan than was available in most British books and periodicals of her time.'[26] Rather than reducing the

[25] Korte, 'The media logic of Victorian periodicals', p. 61.

[26] A.K. Tange, 'Rewriting fairyland: Isabella Bird and the spectacle of nineteenth-century Japan' in A. Easley, C. Gill, and B. Rodgers (eds.), *Women, Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 259.

Victorian travel essay to the formula of an unselfconsciously biased traveller, one should bear in mind what Korte calls the 'media logic', or the canny modes in which periodical essayists 'adapted their presentation of travel for the life-worlds of specific audience segments'.[27]

No Victorian travel essayist had a more subtle awareness of various medial formats and target audiences than Dickens. As the editor of two popular magazines, *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*, Dickens recognised the growing market for travel and placed travel essays – often written by himself but also commissioned from other writers – prominently in his magazines. John Drew has noted that 'Dickens's interest in the essay was in no way inferior to his enthusiasm for voyages and travels',[28] and Christopher Keirstead observes that, in Dickens's hands, 'the travel essay becomes the forum for a specific literary and journalistic hybrid intervention into the unique kinds of social spaces of travel emerging in the mid-nineteenth century', as well as 'the vehicle for reasserting values of community or social responsibility among the Victorian mobile and travelling (middle) class'.[29] Combining a knowledge of the established, often satirical, narrative poses of eighteenth-century travel writers with an attentiveness to readers' needs for sensation and his own socio-political commentaries, Dickens not only shaped the travel essay of his period but also foreshadowed anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist travel writing of the twentieth century.

His *Sketches by Boz* (1836), serialised earlier in popular newspapers and periodicals of the 1830s, presented the reader with an idle, rambling spectator of London life and people, while his *Pictures from Italy* was instrumental in mediating the new middle-class culture of travel to popular, mostly continental, destinations. Catherine Waters has argued that in *Household Words* Dickens 'directed attention to the institutionalisation of tourism and its effect: on the one hand welcoming its democratising spread, while on the other lampooning some of the consequences of commercialism in satiric accounts of the romantic tourist gaze'.[30] *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861), launched in January 1860 in *All the Year Round*, again drew on the popular peripatetic narrative of the

[27] Korte, 'The media logic of Victorian periodicals', p. 62.

[28] J. Drew, 'Voyages extraordinaires: Dickens's "Travelling Essays" and "The Uncommercial Traveller" (Part 1)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 13:2 (June 1996), 77.

[29] C. Keirstead, 'Dickens, travel disorientation, and the emergence of the modern literary travel essay: or, "A flight" (and "Night walks") on flight', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 19:4 (2015), 345.

[30] C. Waters, 'Commodifying culture: continental travel and tourism in *Household Words*' in C. Waters, M. Hollington, and J. Jordan (eds.), *Imagining Italy: Victorian Writers and Travellers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 37.

aimless, loitering, and digressing city walker developed in eighteenth-century periodicals and in his own serial *Sketches by Boz* three decades earlier, combining it with a more overtly socio-political perspective.[31]

The Uncommercial Traveller is an astute and compassionate observer who spots social injustice, poverty, and often death on his idle journeys:

> I am both a town traveller and a country traveller, and am always on the road. Figuratively speaking, I travel for the great house of Human Interest Brothers, and have rather a large connection in the fancy goods way. Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent-garden, London – now about the city streets: now, about the country by-roads – seeing many little things, and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others. These are my chief credentials as the Uncommercial Traveller.[32]

Whether it is the sympathetic report of the trial of a young mother accused of murdering her child, or the description of the body of a woman pulled out of a London canal, the Uncommercial Traveller is an attention-seeking observer, engaged with human mortality and the disturbing squalor of urban slums, and confessing to the 'attraction of repulsion'.[33] Certainly, the success of the series depended much on the combination of often grisly, sensational, and shocking details with the sentimental or satirical comments of an opinionated traveller.

Another prominent topic in Dickens's travel essays is the impact of speed on the traveller's mind. 'A Flight' (1851) describes a railway journey on the South Eastern Railway's new eleven-hour-long 'Double Special Express Service' from London to Paris. The essay amalgamates a flight of the imagination with the narrator's journey into an ambiguous narrative in which the technology of rapid speed is associated with the *Arabian Nights* imagery of a flying carpet. While the description of the landscape outside is made impossible due to the velocity of travel, the essayist indulges in imaginative mobility and a fanciful and extensive investment in the biographies of his co-travellers. The characteristics of the British travel essay developed by writers like Dickens, Bird, and Stevenson would remain in place in the twentieth century. These involved, as we have seen, an informed

[31] For more on *The Uncommercial Traveller*, see J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' in this volume (Ch. 25).
[32] C. Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861, 1863, 1869), ed. D. Tyler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1.
[33] Ibid., p. 229.

commitment to history and the vast intertext of travel writing combined with imaginative storytelling, a strong social involvement of an empathic observer, and an equally strong exploration of the travelling self, often tinged with self-deprecating humour.

Essaying Travel in a Global Context

Freya Stark, one of the most prolific British travel writers of the twentieth century, has expanded the reach of sentimental travel developed in the authors we have been discussing. She left an account of her 1928 journey on a donkey to the politically unstable Jabal Druse state, south of Damascus, then under French rule. In a mix of astute political commentary and orientalist imagery (she invokes the 'image of Aladdin's lamp as the burning spirit of Arab nationalism'),[34] Stark appealed to the readership of *The Cornhill Magazine*, in which the essay was first published in November 1928.[35] At the same time, her audience was the magazine's owner, the publisher John Murray, who commissioned her to write her second book, *The Valley of the Assassins* (1934), about a Persian Muslim sect known as the assassins. Her *Baghdad Sketches* (1932), based on a series of articles written to amuse the readers of *The Baghdad Times*, for which she worked in 1929, are informed by a sympathetic view of the religious and cultural diversity she experienced in what Dúnlaith Bird calls the 'patchwork of contemporary Baghdad'.[36] Stark juxtaposed archaic biblical and orientalist imagery with markers of modernity such as tourism, media, and technology. As a woman traveller, she often clashed with the rigid gender rules she encountered, including those of the British community abroad, thereby debunking clichés of the helpless European woman confronted with a powerful Eastern man. Like Isabella Bird and Mary Kingsley before her, and Dervla Murphy and others after her, Stark consolidated the image of the independent British woman traveller on the global stage in her essays.

Although George Orwell's reputation as Britain's greatest twentieth-century essayist rests more on his political writing and his stylistic brilliance

[34] J.F. Geniesse, *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), p. 84.
[35] F. Stark, 'France in the Jebel Druse: a fortnight's travel notes', *Cornhill Magazine*, 65 (November 1928), 534–56.
[36] D. Bird, 'Freya Stark, selected works (1938–1988)' in Schaff (ed.), *Handbook of British Travel Writing*, p. 473.

than on his travel writing, some of his most famous essays, including 'A Hanging' (1931) and 'Shooting an Elephant' (1936), were based on his experiences as a colonial police officer in northern Burma in the 1920s, exposing the inner conflicts of an anticolonialist representative of the British Raj. One travel essay that embodies all of Orwell's trademarks is 'Marrakech' (1939). The essay presents the reader with a combination of observations on marginalised and mistreated groups – Jews, women, and animals – and reflections on the failures of colonialism. It starts with a powerful image of a corpse that attracts flies, thus metonymically invoking the most parasitic system ever, colonialism: 'As the corpse went past, the flies left the restaurant table in a cloud and rushed after it, but they came back a few minutes later.'[37] Dialogues with people Orwell's traveller meets, combined with phrases in the second person, include the reader on his walk through the town and alert him to what Orwell sees as the complicity between tourists and colonialism:

> In a tropical landscape one's eye takes in everything except the human-beings. It takes in the dried-up soil, the prickly pear, the palm-tree and the distant mountain, but it always misses the peasant hoeing at his patch. He is the same colour as the earth, and a great deal less interesting to look at. It is only because of this that the starved countries of Asia and Africa are accepted as tourist resorts. No one would think of running cheap trips to the Distressed Areas. But where the human-beings have brown skins their poverty is simply not noticed. What does Morocco mean to a Frenchman? An orange-grove or a job in Government service. Or to an Englishman? Camels, castles, palm-trees, Foreign Legionnaires, brass trays and bandits. One could probably live here for years without noticing that for nine-tenths of the people the reality of life is an endless, back-breaking struggle to wring a little food out of an eroded soil.[38]

Combining an indictment of colonialism with a condemnation of tourists' self-absorption and blindness towards suffering, Orwell marks the beginning of a post-war, self-reflective tradition of travel essayists refuting the perspective of the 'imperial I/eye' that informs much travel writing by authors such as Dervla Murphy, Bruce Chatwin, Jan Morris, William Dalrymple, and many others.[39] If, as some scholars have surmised, British essay culture in

[37] G. Orwell, 'Marrakech' in *Facing Unpleasant Facts: Narrative Essays*, ed. G. Packer (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), p. 44.
[38] Ibid., p. 46.
[39] This term was coined by M.L. Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

the second half of the twentieth century 'seemed irremediably dated and attached to a particular social group', we must make an exception for the travel essay.[40]

Bill Buford's *Granta 10: Travel Writing* (1984) includes essays by the most prominent travel writers of the late twentieth century – among them Chatwin, Morris, Jonathan Raban, Paul Theroux, and Redmond O'Hanlon – and attempts to find commonalities between them. Buford sees restlessness and the need to escape as one driving impetus for the contemporary travel essay, and it certainly informs Raban's 'Sea-Room' in *Granta10*, which describes a mid-life urge 'to run away to sea'.[41] The urge to leave one's life and enter the unknown may have always informed travel writing, but it falls upon contemporary travel writers with, as Tim Hannigan puts it, 'the nagging suspicion that all the truly worthwhile journeys have already been done'.[42] As a result, a need emerges to find the unknown in places long discovered and written about.

The success of *Granta 10* was repeated with *The New Granta Book of Travel* (2011), edited by Liz Jobey, and *Granta 157: Should We Have Stayed at Home? New Travel Writing* (2021), edited by William Atkins. These publications demonstrate the breadth and quality of contemporary travel writing in a globalised world where the old binary oppositions between 'I' and 'Other', or known and unknown, have eroded. Their essays have a darker tone, touching upon migration and displacement, war, ecological concerns, prostitution, Covid, and, perhaps above all, borders as geopolitical symbols for a world less peaceful and stable than it was thought to be after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. The title of *Granta 157*, *Should We Have Stayed at Home?*, even seems to question the justification of travelling at all.

The essay has always been considered dialogic, engaging as it does with the world and its readers. Contemporary travel essays, however, take this dialogic quality of the essay to new extremes, often incorporating long conversations between the essayist and people they meet. The voice of an engaged traveller, which in earlier essays matched the imperialist paradigm so well, gives way to voices of travellers who no longer just report, arrange, and assess their experiences but who have begun to listen. 'As I write, I listen

[40] France, 'British and French traditions of the essay', p. 40.
[41] J. Raban, 'Sea-room' in B. Buford (ed.), *Granta 10: Travel Writing* (London: Granta, 1984), pp. 19–34.
[42] T. Hannigan, *The Travel Writing Tribe: Journeys in Search of a Genre* (London: C. Hurst, 2022), p. 52.

to the voices of friends in Kabul, looking for a path out of the city. As I write, I listen to Masoud's voice on the phone looking for a way to get his family to safety. In their voices I hear the flow of war; across cities, across decades', writes Taran N. Khan.[43] Giving the other a voice, exchanging the privileged position of the observer for that of the listener and getting involved as one among equals have become the dominant features of the travel essay in the twenty-first century.

[43] T.N. Khan, 'The Dam' in W. Atkins (ed.), *Granta 157: Should We Have Stayed at Home? New Travel Writing* (London: Granta, 2021), p. 63.

31

Grist for the Mill: History and the Essay in India, 1870–1920

PRITI JOSHI

James Mill's three-volume *The History of British India* appeared in 1817. Even prior to the publication of that tome, Mill had been a prolific writer; much of his work had appeared as essays in periodicals and reviews such as *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, *The Eclectic Review*, and, most prestigiously, *The Edinburgh Review*. The *History* propelled him from piecework essayism into stardom and financial security, with an appointment at the East India Company. Yet in the twelve years of writing his history, Mill never visited India or learned any Indian languages, deficiencies he proudly defended. In the preface to the work, he argued that 'mere observing' and 'the acquisition of languages' is less important than 'the powers of combination, discrimination, classification, judgment, comparison, weighing, inferring, inducting, philosophizing ... which are the powers of most importance for extracting the precious ore from a great mine of rude historical materials'.[1] Mill's extractive metaphor lays bare the colonial investment in using intellectual 'powers' to transform 'rude historical materials' into history. Mill's emphasis on history and his declarations about the absence of reason amongst Indians would leave their stamp on the essay as it emerged in India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

As far as Mill was concerned, Indians generally and Hindus in particular lacked histories because they lacked reason. In the longest section of his book, 'Of the Hindus', he wrote:

[1] J. Mill, *The History of British India*, 3 vols. (London: Baldwin, Craddock, & Joy, 1817), vol. 1, p. xv. The passage infamously continues: 'Whatever is worth seeing or hearing in India, can be expressed in writing. As soon as every thing of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may attain more knowledge of India, in one year, in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and his ears in India' (p. xv). On James Mill as an essayist in the British tradition, see B. Schultz's 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian essay' in this volume (Ch. 27).

> This people, indeed, are perfectly destitute of historical records. Their ancient literature affords not a single production to which the historical character belongs. The works in which the miraculous transactions of former times are described, are poems ... [largely] books of a religious character ... In all, the actions of men and those of deities are mixed together in a set of legends more absurd and extravagant, more transcending the bounds of nature and of reason, less grateful to the imagination and taste of a cultivated and rational people, than those which the fabulous history of any other nation presents to us.[2]

Could the essay form, with its challenge to Enlightenment reason, find root in a colony of the British Empire, one that Mill influentially declared lay outside reason?

By the time Mill was writing, the essay in Britain had established itself as a playful, urbane, open-ended, digressive, and experimental genre. The essayist was, to borrow William Hazlitt's definition in 'The Indian Jugglers' (1821), a juggler of themes.[3] Theodor Adorno in 'The Essay as Form' (1958) would later argue that the essay's power lay in its opposition to positivism, to the scientific method, and to abstract thinking. The essay, he wrote, 'might be interpreted as a protest against the four rules established by Descartes's *Discourse on Method* at the beginning of modern Western science and its theory'.[4] In contrast to the scientific method and philosophy, the essay, according to Adorno, 'thinks in fragments'.[5] From its origins in Michel de Montaigne, who declared that he was only an amateur thinking aloud, a free-thinker rejecting authority, to Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, for whom 'abstraction is the enemy', the essay was celebrated as anti-systemic, transgressive, and 'methodically unmethodical'.[6] Yet its practitioners for much of its history were largely Euro-American and largely male.[7] Virginia Woolf is often the

[2] Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1, p. 99.

[3] T. Karshan, 'What is an essay? Thirteen answers from Virginia Woolf' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 33.

[4] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Tiedeman, trans. S.W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 14.

[5] Ibid., p. 16.

[6] On Montaigne, Hunt, and Hazlitt, see T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, pp. 4 and 6. On method, see Adorno, who declared: 'In the realm of thought it is virtually the essay alone that has successfully raised doubts about the absolute privilege of method' ('Essay as form', p. 9).

[7] In the introduction to her anthology, Joyce Carol Oates describes the masculinist and white trajectory of the essay as 'that staple of traditional essay collections, the unhurried musing of a disembodied (Caucasian, male, privileged) consciousness'. J.C. Oates, 'Introduction: The

first woman and James Baldwin the first non-white essayist included in essay anthologies.[8] The essay's European origins and anti-positivistic stance, as well as Mill's caricature of Indians as lacking reason and history, are necessary backdrops for understanding the essay as it first developed in India. This backdrop, along with the Victorian form of the essay that arrived on the subcontinent, shaped the form the essay took in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With a focus on English-language essays that appeared in Indian journals between 1870 and 1920, this chapter will argue that the Indian essay was both the outcome of the Victorian form of the essay and an indigenised version of that form that emerged to answer local needs and contribute to the nationalist, anticolonial struggle.

The Indian Review Journal

The essay was not a 'native species' to India; it was transplanted, borne on the steamship called empire. The version of the essay that landed on the subcontinent was one that had evolved from its beginnings in Montaigne. Its evolution – in form, style, subject – was integrally tied to material factors, specifically the platform on which essays appeared. Montaigne and Francis Bacon published their essays in bound collections that were frequently revised and updated, an expensive enterprise in early modern Europe.[9] One hundred years later, with the burgeoning print culture of the British middle classes, essays found a home in periodicals. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele famously fused form and platform in their broadsides, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, though ultimately periodicals grew to contain more miscellaneous materials. As Robert Morrison chronicles in his chapter in this

art of the (American) essay' in J.C. Oates and R. Atwan (eds.), *The Best American Essays of the Century* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. xx. For women essayists in the age of Addison and Steele, see J. Spinner, 'What the periodical essay made possible: women essayists in the eighteenth century' in M. Aquilina (ed.), *The Essay at the Limits: Poetics, Politics and Form* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 111–23.

[8] After Woolf and Baldwin, it is as if a spigot turned on: Mary McCarthy, Susan Sontag, Joan Didion, Annie Dillard, Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich, Cynthia Ozick, Zadie Smith, Rebecca Solnit, and Eula Biss are just the tip of the talent. And it is no exaggeration to say that some of the most exciting essayists in the United States today are Black and Indigenous women, including Claudia Rankine, Emily Raboteau, Sasha LaPointe, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, Toni Jensen, Camille Dungy, and Edwidge Danticat. For a nuanced reading of Baldwin's choice of the 'tradition of classical English essayism' as a form of '"doing white-face" as guerrilla camouflage', see O. Field, 'Retiring or engaging: politics in the English essay' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, pp. 237–8.

[9] On the self-conscious use of media (periodical versus book) in the eighteenth-century essay, see D. Gigante's 'On books: the bibliographical essay' in this volume (Ch. 15).

volume, the essay mutated and developed later into the form of the review essay, appearing in review journals (quarterlies, monthlies, and, by the end of the century, weeklies).[10] Such essays were anchored to a feint that Joanne Shattock describes as a 'book under review as a pretext or "peg" on which to hang a more wide-ranging discussion'.[11] Blurring the line between essay and review, review journals specialised in the 'review-like essay and the essay-like review'.[12]

This formulation, made by Walter Bagehot in 1855, leaves out much. More recently, Gregory Dart has described the disposition of these journals as an 'aggressive new reviewing culture ... so anonymous and cut-throat that it was sometimes likened to street crime'.[13] In the hands of Thomas Babington Macaulay, G.H. Lewes, Matthew Arnold, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Leslie Stephen, and hundreds of others, the Victorian 'review-like essay' or 'essay-like review' developed into the 'critical essay'.[14] The point I wish to stress is that this form of the essay was quite distinct from the digressive, experimental, meditative, provisional, poetic, personal, Montaignian essay. While Victorian review essays are not well represented in today's essay collections, their absence belies their reach: the metastasis of the British Empire meant that the Victorian review culture was exported everywhere Britons imposed themselves.[15]

As part of a colonial strategy to introduce English 'literature' and print culture to India, the essay arrived in India in its Victorian guise, the review essay in the review journal. India's first English-language review periodical was *The Calcutta Review*, founded in 1844 and edited by John William Kaye, a military man turned journalist turned historian.[16] As with the novel, the

[10] See R. Morrison's 'Nineteenth-century reviews reviewed' in this volume (Ch. 24).

[11] J. Shattock, 'Reviews' in L. Brake and M. Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: British Library, 2009), pp. 538–9. See, too, J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper' in this volume (Ch. 25), where this idea is likewise developed.

[12] Walter Bagehot quoted in J. Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers: The Edinburgh and The Quarterly in the Early Victorian Age* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), p. 109.

[13] G. Dart, 'The Romantic essay and the city' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 175.

[14] On the critical essay in Victorian periodicals, see L. Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Shattock, *Politics and Reviewers*, pp. 109–18; and J. Camlot's 'Victorian essays in criticism' in this volume (Ch. 23).

[15] This was likewise true on the African continent. See, e.g., J.M. Jackson's 'The African Gold Coast essay: straddling fact and prophecy' in this volume (Ch. 32), which discusses periodical cultures and networks.

[16] J.W. Kaye's multi-volume *History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864–76), based on the author's work at the India Office in London from 1856–74, is still considered a standard account of the war.

review periodical was indigenised, and before long Indians were editing and writing in review journals. Of the English-language Indian review journals, *Mookerjee's Magazine* is one of the earliest. It was established in 1861, folded after a few months, but was revived in 1872.[17] That same year, *Bangadarshan*, India's most influential vernacular-language journal of the nineteenth century, started appearing as well. Founded and edited by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (universally referred to by contemporaries and scholars as Bankim),[18] the Bengali-language journal was both a literary magazine and review journal. Following *Mookerjee's Magazine* and *Bangadarshan*, a slew of Indian-edited and authored review journals started to appear in print in the 1870s. Rahul Sagar's online *Ideas of India* project provides a glimpse into these untapped riches; to date, his team has tracked down and indexed over four hundred English-language Indian periodicals, of which ninety-four started in the nineteenth century.[19] My concern here is with the English-language essay that started to appear in Indian review journals in the 1870s and its development through to 1920, when, following the horrific Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919, when British troops opened fire on a crowd of unarmed protesters, the political landscape on the subcontinent shifted categorically and the anticolonial nationalist struggle took centre stage.[20] As the movement for independence gathered steam, the content of Indian journals and the nature of the essays that appeared in them changed.[21]

There is no better portal into the English-language review essay in India than the works of a chronicler of that phenomenon. Between 1905 and 1907, a Calcutta barrister named S.C. Sanial who had an instinct for research and an evident obsession with the press published a six-part series in the quarterly *Journal of the Moslem Institute* called 'Story of an Indian Journalist'. The series resembled a Victorian review essay – except that the conceit of a book under

[17] *The Calcutta Monthly Review* appears to be the first Indian-edited review; it came out in January 1858 and folded in May after only four numbers; see M.K. Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1858–1880* (Kolkata, India: K.P. Bagchi, 2008), p. 28.

[18] Due to the vagaries of anglicisation and transliteration, his last name sometimes appears as Chatterji or Chattopadhyay; I have chosen 'Chatterjee' because that is how he signed his name when writing in English and because the collection of his essays and letters I cite from uses that spelling.

[19] R. Sagar, *Ideas of India*, www.ideasofindia.org (accessed 22 July 2023). Any record that includes vernacular-language journals (of which there were many, in languages ranging from Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Bengali, Telegu, and more) will only prove an even greater embarrassment of riches.

[20] In the wake of the massacre, for instance, Rabindranath Tagore renounced the 1915 knighthood conferred on him, two years after he was awarded the Nobel Prize.

[21] Sagar writes in *Ideas of India* that 'After 1947, these periodicals underwent mass extinction.'

review was dropped entirely and the matter under review was a life. The journalist featured in Sanial's series was Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, the editor of the early English-language review journal *Mookerjee's Magazine*. Sanial's unfinished account (though part six indicates 'To Be Continued', I have been unable to track any further parts in the series) is a fascinating portrait of an essayist-editor as a young man.

Much of Sanial's serial review essay is concerned with charting Mookerjee's evolution into an editor and his participation in what we might today refer to as a print network, one composed of Indian men educated in colonial schools who worked to build a press culture. Sanial followed his essay series on Mookerjee with an even more ambitious project, a twelve-part series (also unfinished) that appeared between 1907 and 1911 in the early Anglo-Indian review periodical *The Calcutta Review*, on the history of the press in India. During those same years, additional essays by Sanial on the freedom of the press also appeared in *The Hindustan Review*, established in 1905 as one of the most significant Indian review journals. Sanial appears to have been indefatigable, indeed, single-minded, in writing about the press – whether European, indigenous, vernacular-language, Hindu, or Muslim – and about press personalities. Over the span of four decades (1895–1934), his work appeared in a wide range of review journals including *The National Magazine*, *Journal of the Moslem Institute*, *The Hindustan Review*, *Islamic Culture*, *The Muslim Review*, and *The Calcutta Review*.[22] With the exception of the last, these periodicals were largely indigenously edited, included mostly Indian writers, and were based in Calcutta, Hyderabad, and Allahabad.[23]

Indian Journals and History

Sanial serves as a choice gateway to the English-language essay in India for a number of reasons: he wrote about press personalities and journals; his work appears in a platform, the review journal, that was imported to India from Britain in the nineteenth century; his essays exemplify the form the essay took in the English-language periodical press in India; and his focus on

[22] A barrister by training, Sanial was an amateur historian as well. One of his earliest publications, 'What should be the aims of an historian', appeared in 1896 in the London-based *Indian Magazine and Review*. He was a member of the Calcutta Historical Society, served as its secretary from 1916, and was assistant editor to the society's journal, *Bengal: Past and Present*, from 1914.

[23] *Islamic Culture* was edited by Marmaduke Pickthall, an English Anglican who converted to Islam.

historical narratives and personalities registers a move that gripped many Indian scholars, professionals, and amateurs in the years between 1870 and 1920. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a 'hunger for history' captured the imagination of the Indian intelligentsia.[24] This fervour was fed by anticolonial sentiments and a growing belief that India needed to write its own history in order to throw off the shackles of the British.

Bankim was pivotal to this enthusiasm. He observed that Europeans were obsessed with writing history. Even if they went out shooting birds, a history of the event had to be written, he quipped, and he wanted Indians to do the same. 'Even if we yawn', he wrote in his signature satiric vein, 'the act should be acknowledged as one of immortal glory in this world and duly recorded.'[25] Many Indians were infected by Bankim's belief that a nation needs to write its own history to come into existence.[26] Thus, in the words of the historian Kumkum Chatterjee, 'history became a public passion'.[27] A broad array of writers participated in the project of producing Indian history – or histories – and their accounts and debates occupy substantial space in the review journals of the period.

This same emphasis on history can be traced to the earliest Indian review journal, *Mookerjee's Magazine*, which in its brief inaugural appearance in 1861 used the feint of a book review to publish a four-part history of 'Raja Radhakanta and his Ancestors'.[28] While the world of Indian journals – even English-language ones only – is as diverse as the subcontinent itself, we can identify a skein of writings on history that appeared in almost every review journal. Topics covered include the enterprise of writing history, local histories, and historical relations between India and the non-European world. The following sample provides a glimpse into the range of histories Indian writers were exploring and writing in English-language Indian review

[24] The phrase is Rabindranath Tagore's. S. Kaviraj translates it as 'hunger for history' in *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 120. D. Chakrabarty renders it as 'enthusiasm for history', in 'The birth of academic historical writing in India' in S. Macintyre, J. Maiguashca, and A. Pók (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Vol. 4: *1800–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 524.

[25] Quoted in T. Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 175.

[26] Kaviraj translates Bankim's famous line as 'the Bengalis must have a history, or else, they would never become human beings' (*Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 124).

[27] K. Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy: history and nation-making in late colonial India', *American Historical Review*, 110:5 (December 2005), 1454.

[28] For a more detailed discussion of this journal, see P. Joshi, 'To swell a scene: reviewing books and history in *Mookerjee's Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 55:2 (Summer 2022), 257–73.

journals between 1873 and 1908: 'Universities in Ancient India'; 'Pataliputra: Its Place in Indian History'; 'The Origin and Development of Muslim Law'; 'The English and the Court and Camp of Sivaji'; 'The Political Institutions of Patriarchal Times'; 'Origin of Khatrias'; 'The Tamils: Eighteen Hundred Years Ago'; 'The Origin of the Devnagari Alphabet'; 'History of the Trade of Ancient India'; 'Damascus and the Court of the Omayyads'; and 'Islam in China'.[29] Perusing the pages of review journals, one is struck by the diversity of historical investigations that appear in them. No region or population feels too obscure – or large – for a learned essay.

This steady stream of essays on historical events and periods in review journals was part of that larger enthusiasm for history that Bankim, most prominently, had articulated. His inducement to his fellow Bengalis and Indians to write indigenous histories fuelled two distinct, but also intertwined, developments: on the one hand, the gradual codification of the discipline of history as a 'scientific', academic enterprise, and on the other, 'a romantic, anticolonial nationalism' that 'looked on literature as an expression of the national spirit'.[30] History as a professional discipline did not settle in India until the 1920s, but the previous decades were a period of immense ferment during which a wide range of writers – young scholars and emerging professionals, public intellectuals, littérateurs, 'dedicated gentlemen enthusiasts', 'distinguished men of letters',[31] and amateurs – used a variety of publications and reviews to debate what constituted history, who was best placed to write it, and what sources one should draw on for those histories.

The matter of sources and how to treat them caused the greatest friction and debate amongst the many Indians who plunged into writing histories. For professional historians (those affiliated with higher education, museums, or semi-professional organisations such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal, or the Calcutta Historical Society to which Sanial belonged), 'hard evidence' was necessary for rigorous historical work. In their view, archival documents, archaeological artefacts, coins, and other historical materials

[29] This selection of essays appeared in *Hindustan Review*, *Journal of the Moslem Institute*, *Haris Chandra's Magazine*, and *Madras Review*. Some journals published anonymous essays; others included the names of authors and their credentials (BAs and barristers abound).

[30] D. Chakrabarty, 'Romantic archives: literature and the politics of identity in Bengal', *Critical Inquiry*, 30:3 (Spring 2004), 658, 660. On the emergence of scientific history in India, see Chakrabarty, 'The birth of academic historical writing in India'; Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy'; and R. Chaudhuri, 'History in poetry: Nabinchandra Sen's *Palashir Yuddha* and the question of truth', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 66:4 (November 2007), 897–918.

[31] Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy', 1470; Chaudhuri, 'History in poetry', 907.

constituted the best sources.[32] The colonial government, for its part, resisted opening its records to scholars or creating a public archive.[33] Partly for this reason, but also for ideological ones, many of those who were committed to the project of an indigenous history turned to the documents and papers of old families in India. The *kulajis* (pre-colonial, patrilineal genealogies of elite families)[34] and *bakhars* (historical chronicles that 'mixed genealogical myths and dynastic pride')[35] were a rich resource for many. Those who drew on such genealogies and chronicles, as Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, 'often combined literary and other genres to produce romantic and affectionate accounts of the glories of the pasts of different groups in India'.[36]

In addition to what sources to use, these history writers also disputed how best to treat those sources. The 'professionals' insisted that sources be corroborated, interrogated, subjected to 'source criticism'.[37] Akshaykumar Maitreya, for instance, noted in 1897 that he preferred to 'adopt the critical methods of investigation recommended by "the historians of the modern school in Europe" [rather] than to follow the time-honoured practice of swallowing all extravagant stories without any sort of investigation'.[38] By contrast, those intellectuals who drew on the *kulajis* or *bakhars* argued that these documents were 'not objects of dubious historicity, [but] constituted an invaluable trove of indigenous social history of the region'.[39] The latter group of historians, moreover, argued that while Western-educated historians focused on the *rashtra* (state), they, indigenous historians, were attuned to the *samaj* (society or community).[40]

The debates between these two varieties of historians were part of a larger engagement with modernity. The indigenous historians not only 'idealiz[ed] the samaj as a sphere of peaceful quotidian activities', but also positioned themselves against both Western notions of history *and* Islamic or Indo-Persian histories.[41] The consequences of reacting to European colonialism and modernity by exalting communal (in this case, Hindu) histories and lives were deplored by Rabindranath Tagore in his 1916 novel, *Ghare Baire* (translated as *The Home and the World*). This warning was unfortunately ignored, for 'communalism' has been in the ascendancy in India since the demolition of the Babri masjid, or mosque, in 1992. Ironically, the historians

[32] Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy', 1462.
[33] Chakrabarty, 'The birth of academic historical writing in India', pp. 528–9.
[34] Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy', 1455 ff.
[35] Chakrabarty, 'The birth of academic historical writing in India', p. 525. [36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., p. 532. [38] Chaudhuri, 'History in poetry', 903.
[39] Chatterjee, 'The king of controversy', 1464. [40] Ibid., 1467–8. [41] Ibid., 1468.

who drew on genealogies of elite families were not as anti-European as they liked to claim. As Kumkum Chatterjee points out, they positioned their labours in the German Romantic tradition of Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte.[42] Chatterjee acknowledges the 'limitations inherent in the romantic celebration of the "people's" history', but also reminds us that in the case of India such nativist history was a response to 'the encroachments of an alienating colonial modernity'.[43] Chakrabarty, on the other hand, views the exchanges between the two camps of historians as more productive. He writes that it was from the 'messiness and the overlaps between amateur historians writing to glorify some identity and historians like Jadunath Sarkar trying to give history the respectability of a knowledge-form, [that] there gradually emerged the principles of objective, academic histories'.[44]

Alongside debates about history as a profession ran a second thread of interest: literature as the site where the imagining and invention of the nation could occur. In a subtle essay, Rosinka Chaudhuri has argued that the late nineteenth-century turn to history occurred in 'the context of a powerful literary scene in which eminent novelists such as Bankimchandra and popular poets such as Nabinchandra were the agents who first depicted the history of India to its people in stirring lines of poetry and prose'.[45] The lines between history and literature at this moment were permeable, and historical accounts were often written *in response to* literary ones. Thickening our understanding of the relation between historical and literary accounts in the period is Sudipta Kaviraj, who argues that Bankim's 'novels [were] a continuation of history, uttering what history could not'.[46] To Chaudhuri's and Kaviraj's perspectives on the twining of history and fiction, I would add this: Bankim, known in his day as 'the Walter Scott of Bengal', wrote novels and essays simultaneously. His essays in English appeared in the Anglo-Indian *Calcutta Review* and in *Mookerjee's Magazine*, while his essays in Bengali appeared in his journal *Bangadarshan* and elsewhere. These essays were centrally preoccupied with crafting an indigenous history from literary, religious, and philosophical subjects.

[42] Ibid., 1465. [43] Ibid., 1471.
[44] Chakrabarty, 'The birth of academic historical writing in India', p. 531.
[45] Chaudhuri, 'History in poetry', 907.
[46] Kaviraj, *Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 111. For a nuanced analysis of Bankim's engagement with 'factual' history, his creation of 'imaginary histories' in his novels, and his struggles circumscribing the nation, see ch. 4 of the same work. For a critical analysis of the Hindu thrust of the Romantic–nationalist literature of late nineteenth-century Bengali writers, see Chakrabarty, 'Romantic archives'.

Whereas Bankim's essays appear at the start of the period under review, Sanial's close that period. In the *Calcutta Review* series, Sanial had written at length about the British government's bureaucratic control of the press. In over 600 pages (with the average length of an essay at 50 pages), he painstakingly charted, for instance, official arguments for and against the deportation of James Silk Buckingham in the 1820s; lengthy debates leading up to the 1857 'Gagging Act'; arguments in favour of and against Section 124A, the British law regarding 'disaffection' amongst colonial subjects; and the persistence of journalists, Anglo-Indian as well as Indian, against such repressive measures. Sanial's evidence consists of records of exchanges between officials of the British government in India or between London and Calcutta-based officials of the East India Company (to 1858), or, after 1858, between the Crown's representatives (the Raj). It also includes minutes of meetings, letters between errant editors and a punitive government, and petitions opposing government intervention in the press. This is the 'document Raj' in all its tedious dreariness. Reading the series in the context of what we know about the colonial government's refusal to open the archives leads to both admiration for Sanial's sleuthing and a degree of frustration about his silence on sourcing. The cumulative effect of reading such an array of documents is the sense that officials of the colonial government of India were pompous, preposterous, petty, almost uniformly ill-informed, unimaginative, jealously guarding their small turfs, and devoted to officialese.

Sanial says none of this, but simply provides extensive documentary evidence. His minimal commentary is surely the product of his position as a colonial subject exposing the century-long censorship of an increasingly intransigent and punitive colonial regime. It is also connected to his participation in the hunger for history that affected many Indians: his use of documentary data allies him with the 'scientific' historians who insisted on archival evidence over oral records or genealogies. In his presentation of this astonishing range of documentation with little commentary, however, he eschews the investigation and 'source criticism' that professional historians like Jadunath Sarkar promoted.[47]

[47] In this regard, Sanial might look more like an antiquarian than a historian. I rely on Rosemary Sweet's work to complicate this dichotomy. She argues that 'there is no simple dichotomy between the enlightened world of conjectural history and the tedious pedantry of antiquarianism'; R. Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2004), p. xiv. Antiquaries were, she argues, 'important actors in that explosion of print and ideas, that thirst for knowledge and understanding which some have called the British Enlightenment' (p. xiv). My aim is not to import wholesale Sweet's analysis of eighteenth-century British culture to India; it is, instead, to muddy the gatherer-versus-analyser binary.

And in his silence on the locations of sources, he looks more like the amateur historians of the day.[48]

Sanial, then, serves as representative of several strands of an intellectual moment recorded in the Indian review journal: an essayist 'reviewing' history in a journal; a historian who straddled methodologies of both the professional and non-professional historian; a writer who subjected his sources to little commentary. In his series on British control of the press, he also stood *apart* from his compatriots: in writing histories about the British in India – a necessary feature of any history of the press in India – he differs from his many comrades who, whether drawing on print or oral archives, genealogies or archaeology, wrote histories of India or regions of India, not of the British in India. As a historian, Sanial straddled debates about sources and methodology that preoccupied a range of Indian historians in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, while as an essayist, his writings proceed in a vein similar to those of Bankim. Sanial's essays were a vehicle for historical inquiry on a range of topics; they were structured and formal if not academic; and they were dense, not with allusion, but with data. Both Bankim's and Sanial's essays were in this sense closer to Bacon's than Montaigne's: they were focused on the matter at hand and effaced the authorial self; and they used the form to impose something like order and meaning on the subject. Theirs was the essay as criticism.

The Essay Transported and Translated

In conclusion, let us return to James Mill and the impact his *History of British India* had on the essayistic writing of history in India. Bankim, who did more to champion indigenous histories than any other nineteenth-century Indian writer and who spent his writing life crafting an indigenous national narrative and history, was, in fact, shaped and inspired by utilitarianism and positivism. Tapan Raychaudhuri notes that 'the world of contemporary western thought [Bankim] knew best were the works of Hume, Bentham, James Mill and Auguste Comte'.[49] The historian Amiya Sen writes that Bankim's life-long

[48] Chakrabarty writes of one such amateur historian, Viswanath Rajwade, 'who was perhaps the most remarkable collector of historical documents in early twentieth-century India, [and] published twenty-two volumes of historical records between 1898 and 1921. Yet . . . he would only sometimes give the full details of where his sources came from and at other times maintain "complete silence"'; Chakrabarty, 'The birth of academic historical writing in India', p. 530.

[49] Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 125.

researches into the history, culture, religion, and philosophy of Hinduism 'were deeply influenced by the reigning intellectual trends in contemporary Europe', including the works of Immanuel Kant, Fichte, John Robert Seeley, Comte, Ernest Renan, and Herbert Spencer, whom he freely cited.[50] The enthusiasm for history Bankim inaugurated, in other words, was not a rejection of Western forms of history writing, but a reaction to the imperial condescension that, from at least the time of Mill's *History*, posited Indians as lacking any conception of history because they lacked reason.

In the passage below, Mill takes cover behind David Hume to buttress his strident views on Indians and their supposed lack of historical consciousness:

> If it be true, as an acute and eloquent historian has remarked, 'that the sudden, violent, and unprepared revolutions incident to barbarians, are so much guided by caprice, and terminate so often in cruelty, that they disgust us by the uniformity of their appearance, and it is rather fortunate for letters that they are buried in silence and oblivion,' we have perhaps but little to regret in the total absence of Hindu records.[51]

Given the stature of Mill in the nineteenth century, the Indian project of producing indigenous histories was less imitation than defiance.[52] In the effort to prove themselves as having a history and reason, some esssayists responded by embracing European historical methods. Bankim's comment about writing a history of each yawn satirically points in this direction. Others responded by rejecting British historical precepts and drilled down into those very indigenous sources that Mill disdained.[53]

In this environment, the room for a playful, belletristic, even anti-Enlightenment essay must have felt like, to use a current colloquialism, a first-world luxury. The essay has been defined – consecrated, one might say – as opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and the 'imperialism of scientific method', as Robert L. Kauffmann characterises it.[54] (The metaphor is, if

[50] A.P. Sen, *Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay: An Intellectual Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 76.

[51] Mill, *History*, vol. 1, p. 101.

[52] For an analysis of the adoption of portions of Mill by nineteenth-century Hindu, Bengali thinkers, including Bankim, and the survival of Mill's periodisation in current history textbooks, see S. Sarkar, 'The many worlds of Indian history' in *Writing Social History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 16–20.

[53] Yet others, like Gandhi, rejected the English 'habit of writing history' altogether. See S. Khilnani, 'Gandhi and Nehru: the uses of English' in A.K. Mehrotra (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature in English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 150.

[54] R.L. Kauffmann, 'The skewed path: essaying as un-methodical method' in A.J. Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 227.

inadvertently, apt.) For those subjected to imperial regimes, who had been written out of the Enlightenment, or who were required by their forced entry into modernity to prove their rationality, the essay form as impressionistic, speculative, and provisional was not the most intuitive home. Bankim, even as he defended Bengali literature against its dismissal by the Mills of the world, wrote about the need for 'criticism' in terms that are telling: 'Intelligent criticism may be said to be a thing unknown to the native press', he wrote in 1870; and again, in 1871, 'We can hardly hope for a healthy and vigorous Bengali literature in the utter absence of anything like intelligent criticism.'[55] If fiction and poetry were the places where protest against imperial regimes flourished and imagination blossomed, the essay was, for Indian writers, the place where reason must shine. In this sense, it should come as no surprise that, at this juncture in India's colonial history and nascent anticolonial movement, the essay in India developed in the form of a structured critical-historical essay in a review periodical – or that the English-language essay in India was determinedly *not* of the free-flowing, heterogeneous, unmethodical, associative variety.[56]

Though Mill's assessments about Indian literature and Hinduism were roundly challenged, his caricature of Indian history and reason haunted the English-language essay in India and nudged it towards the structured essay over the more heterogeneous, unmethodical, transgressive one. In short, the form of the Indian-English essay was overdetermined. It was determined by the imperial condescension of writers like Mill who denied Indians reason and historical consciousness; by the form of the review periodical imported from Britain in the nineteenth century; and by the 'enthusiasm for history' that swept over an anticolonial, nationalist, and modernising India. To say this is not to suggest that Indians had no agency. As the variety of ways they negotiated the writing of history and nation-making indicates, Indians actively reworked and indigenised the ideas and platforms unloaded on their shores.

[55] B.C. Chatterjee, *Essays and Letters*, ed. B.N. Banerji and S.K. Das (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2010), pp. 20, 35.

[56] As others have argued, virtually from the moment of its birth the modern essay split at the root and developed two trunks: the Montaignian essay and the Baconian, whose branches include Boyle, Burke, Rousseau (whose *First Discourse*, it is worth recalling, was written in response to an essay contest in 1749), and J.S. Mill.

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The African Gold Coast Essay: Straddling Fact and Prophecy

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In 1915, the eminent Gold Coast writer and statesman J.E. Casely Hayford, known there as the 'uncrowned king of West Africa', published a brief and enigmatic text with the publishing house of C.M. Phillips in London. With the British capital still the centre of imperial control over what would later become Ghana, London was a risky place in which to present a case for West Africa as the vanguard of imperial Christian leadership. But in his essay 'William Waddy Harris: The West African Reformer', totalling a mere nineteen pages plus two appendices, that is exactly what Casely Hayford did. After publishing numerous treatises that sought to systematise his native laws and customs, and thereby legitimate them for a metropolitan readership, Casely Hayford turned here to more elusive spiritual matters as the basis from which West Africa would raise the British Empire toward the zenith of world civilisation. 'William Waddy Harris' chronicled the author's stirring real-life encounter with a proto-Pentecostal Liberian evangelist, but also the limits of his ability, as a cosmopolitan man of letters, to represent a changing West African Christian experience.[1] Read in the context of Casely Hayford's career, as well as the busy print and lecture scene that buttressed the rise of Gold Coast nationalism in the early twentieth century, the essay attempts to square an abiding commitment to public rationality with openness to a civilisation-shifting messianic encounter. It serves as the richest example of the stakes driving the development of Gold Coast essayistic culture, which was marked by an epistemologically tense but politically fruitful negotiation between cold objectivity and hot religious conviction.

This chapter will argue that the early twentieth-century Gold Coast essay advanced two seemingly ill-matched frameworks for understanding national independence: it insisted on the paramount importance of a lived African

[1] My thanks to Ebony Coletu for first directing me to Harris's influence on Casely Hayford's thought.

perspective, but within a paradigm of scientific precision and neutrality towards facts associated with the British Empire. Subjectivity worked in tandem with a no-nonsense appeal to quantifiable truths, and this was complicated further by Casely Hayford and his peers' claim to Fantes' unique status as arbiters of Akan civilisational progress, despite the fact that they themselves often worked at a remove from the larger Gold Coast population. 'Akan' refers to what is sometimes called a West African 'meta-ethnicity' that encompasses numerous smaller ethnic groups including the Asante, Fante, Akuapem, and Nzima, and which have been identified at different points in history with different kinds of governance (per Casely Hayford's own work, often an indigenous mix of kingdoms, chieftancies, and democracy). The Asante are the largest Akan group and speak the language Twi, and the Fante, to which Casely Hayford belonged, are the second-largest Akan group and speak the language Fante.[2] Managing a dual identity as international representatives of an African point of view and as seasoned metropolitan intellectuals, Casely Hayford and fellow essayists, like S.R.B. Attoh Ahuma and J.W. de Graft Johnson, depicted the Gold Coast as equal parts pious and progressive. As he and his intellectual class endeavoured to build a modern nation of fervent faith, the essay form's characteristic focus on empirical experience was stretched to its limit by a turn towards direct individual contact with God. Put differently, the literary challenge of representing experience combined with the historical challenge of representing *African* experience perfectly converged in and as the Gold Coast essay of Christian, anticolonial nationalism.

The Anglo-Fante Essay in Context

The flexibility of the essay made it well suited to capture what seem like conflicting agendas among the Gold Coast intelligentsia who sought modes of expression that could encompass both rational modernity and religious zeal. In this respect, the essay in their hands had at once to claim and to forfeit secular authority. But representatives of this brand of essayism also faced a more delicate challenge, namely that their leadership credentials

[2] Fantes are a coastal people, while the Asante Empire in the colonial period was located inland to the Fantes' north. (Present-day Ghana includes the Gold Coast, Asante, and what were formerly named the Northern Territories.) Asantes and Fantes were still, to a large degree, rivals during Casely Hayford's life, and were prominently at war in the early nineteenth century (1806–7). They nonetheless bear close customary and linguistic ties, and Casely Hayford wrote about both traditions.

stemmed partly from their self-proclaimed insight into an African experiential register whose spiritual character began shifting in dramatic ways in the first decades of the twentieth century. Fante elites around this time believed in their unique civilisational advancement, even relative to their actual and cultural neighbours in the Asante Empire. The penultimate chapter of Casely Hayford's novel *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), for example, titled 'A Similitude: The Greek and the Fanti', directly links ancient Greece as a locus of culture to Fantedom as its successor. A brief section of 'Editorial Notes' published in the newspaper *The Gold Coast Leader* on 25 February of the same year begins: 'The Fantis have always been remarkable in forecasting the future. Intuitively they have either approved or condemned proposals which the passage of years has invariably endorsed', before proclaiming outright that 'The Gold Coast is a land of Prophets and Prognosticators.'[3]

The Atlantic coastal region was also a prominent destination for Methodist and Anglican missionaries, and the churches of Cape Coast and Axim, in particular, became hubs of cultural activity in both English and vernacular languages.[4] Indeed, the administration of an anticolonial state was so intimately bound up with Methodist mission culture as to directly inform the biographies of the writers this chapter addresses. Casely Hayford was born in 1866 to a prominent minister (Joseph de Graft Hayford), and Attoh Ahuma was born to a minister and became one himself. In its combination of scientific and messianic impulses, the Fante intelligentsia drew on a history of nuts-and-bolts state planning and their substantial familiarity with Protestant mission ideals.

Their use of the essay form highlights the local intelligentsia's conjoined investment in factuality (contra dogma) and a form of imperialism cast as a

[3] All quotes directly from Gold Coast newspapers in this chapter are from my own notes and scans from archives held at the British Library. On the subject of Fante cultural distinction, Carl Christian Reindorf, the ethnic Ga pastor and historian, writes in his *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* from 1889 (published 1895) that Fanteland is 'the land of history, the land of poetry and enlightenment and semi-civilization'; quoted in K. Konadu and C.C. Campbell (eds.), *The Ghana Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 204. This idea of Fantes as culturally if not economically elite was (and to some degree remains) pervasive. See C. Reindorf, 'To the educated community in the Gold Coast colony' in Konadu and Campbell (eds.), *Ghana Reader*, pp. 202–6. One might contrast their embrace of prophecy with the utilitarian critique of prophecy in favour of more scientific methods of socio-political analysis, as discussed in Bart Schultz's 'Political theory and ethics in the Victorian essay' in this volume (Ch. 27).

[4] S. Newell's *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) provides a rich history of the Methodist Book Depot's role in the formation of both anglophone and vernacular literacies in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as an introduction to the culture of literary and debate clubs in the period.

responsibility to be educated about the empire's constituent nations (contra an ignorant and unjust colonialism). Mission Christianity provided the religious and material resources for this simultaneously anticolonial and pro-imperial Fante politics. A movement then known as 'Gone Fantee' advocated for a revived interest in 'native' dress, Akan names, local languages, and a place for Gold Coast history on school curricula. Journalists, both named and anonymous, held forth on the 'big ideas' guiding the political debates of the day. An essay published in *The Gold Coast Leader* on 4 March 1911, 'The Atavistic Tendencies of the Age: A National Asset', is a good case in point. A matter-of-fact introductory discussion of atavism in light of Charles Darwin, medical science, and criminology gives way to a grand, backward-and-forward-looking cultural and racial vision of 'that inevitable goal [of fulfilled nationhood] that will prove to be the very height of sublimity wherein our souls will be enraptured, enthralled and expanded'. In short, analysis gives way to prophecy.

Experience evolved for the Fante elite from an empirical into a miraculous episteme, as the Gold Coast essay moved between clear-cut documentation of Akan customs and practices and the mystical registers of fervent Christianity. That Protestant missions played an integral part in the rise of Gold Coast print culture is hardly surprising, nor was this a phenomenon unique to the Gold Coast. Early South African intellectuals like Tiyo Soga, who translated John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into his native isiXhosa in 1866, also nurtured interests in African nationhood from within the confines of Christian mission schools. Yet religion's role in different but overlapping explanations for the essay's unique development in the Gold Coast has gone unobserved.

The lead essay (originally a lecture) of De Graft Johnson's collection *Towards Nationhood in West Africa: Thoughts of Young Africa Addressed to Young Britain* (1928) invokes Christian duty as the bedrock of African-British relations in its second paragraph.[5] 'There are various organisations in England working for international and inter-racial cooperation and understanding', he writes; 'They have varied programs and varied methods of

[5] The easy movement between lectures and essays also speaks to the intermingling of various short forms in Gold Coast intellectual life. As J.W. de Graft Johnson points out in a footnote to his historical essay 'The aborigines society', even his close Anglo-Fante intellectual predecessor John Mensah Sarbah's grand legal treatise, *Fanti Customary Laws*, began as 'a series of articles and pamphlets . . . during his student days in England'. De Graft Johnson, *Towards Nationhood in West Africa: Thoughts of Young Africa Addressed to Young Britain* (1928; New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 28.

work, but all are conscious of the supreme importance to be attached to the leavening and beneficent influence of Christianity.'[6] Gold Coast intellectuals recreate the conditions usually associated with a distinct kind of secular-political discourse in their manufacturing of an innovative, flourishing African press through which the essay form matures. Among a nascent managerial class, the new Gold Coast intelligentsia, frequently trained as lawyers, vie with traditional chiefs for administrative control and publish lengthy discussions of municipal logistics, such as sanitation and infrastructure, the most common topics. And yet these same leaders, in the same newspapers and often on the same pages, link their governance directly to the Church. An essay from 18 April 1912 in *The Gold Coast Nation*, titled 'Our Confession of Faith', moves in the space of three columns from discussing the civic institutions required to sustain 'a healthy public opinion' to an injunction to fulfil the nation's mission 'in the order of Providence', brought together by 'the common God of our Race'.[7] Gold Coast essayists embraced the same religious authority from which British essayists are usually seen as diverging.[8]

The interpenetration of journalistic and lecture-based platforms enabling the Gold Coast essay's proliferation also suggests a bridge to the widespread emphasis, in scholarship on the essay, on the centrality of 'voice' to the form. If, as Kathryn Murphy argues, the essay across even great differences in content manifests a 'perennial preoccupation with experience, rather than abstraction or metaphysics, as the ground of knowledge',[9] this is often achieved by trying to replicate idiosyncratic thinking processes. For the Gold Coast essayist, the performance of subjectivity is a matter of demonstrating a specifically African perspective, usually in order to advance the cause of African self-rule. The essay's continuity with oratory allows Casely Hayford, Attoh Ahuma, and De Graft Johnson to speak (literally) for themselves as prominent members of the Gold Coast intelligentsia, while also engineering, both in person and print, an emerging social type of 'the educated African'. The confidence and magnetism of their rhetoric is itself a point of persuasion for their nationalist politics. This is especially germane to Casely Hayford, who moved fluidly between his prominent political

[6] Ibid., p. 20. [7] Anon., 'Our Confession of Faith', *Gold Coast Nation* (18 April 1912).
[8] We might make an exception for early printed sermons; see N. Reisner's 'The sermon and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 5).
[9] K. Murphy, 'Of sticks and stones: the essay, experience, and experiment' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020), p. 80.

activism in London (as president of the National Congress of British West Africa) and lecturing in the Gold Coast libraries and literary 'clubs' that Stephanie Newell has described as an emerging intellectual scene around this time.[10]

The stylised presentation of a lived perspective is also where the essayistic emphasis on experience broadly defined, as against objectivity and systematicity, became most fraught for the Gold Coast intelligentsia. One explanation for the Anglo-Fante turn to the essay would be that it offered something different, and perhaps more personal, from the long and highly systematic treatises that had come to define their intellectual milieu – including, most prominently, Casely Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (1903) and, by the lawyer and politician John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti Customary Laws* (1904). Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy describe the essay form as '[resisting] scholarship and orderly composition'.[11] In this light, Casely Hayford, Attoh Ahuma, De Graft Johnson, and the numerous anonymous essayists surrounding them, might be seen as using essays to augment the largely non-narrative, ethnographic account of Akan cultural practices brought to international view by these longer texts. And they do, as noted above, use essays to invoke 'voice' and point of view in an explicit way, emphasising the importance of being African to understanding African politics.

De Graft Johnson puts it plainly in a footnote to the lecture-turned-essay 'British Youth and Africa' (1928): 'The African is best interpreted by the African and opportunity should be given to him to explain his point of view.'[12] If one accepts the educated Gold Coaster's ability to represent the African social whole (and this is a big if), then what Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò calls the essay's 'centrality of standpoint' seems ideally suited to De Graft Johnson's 'Africa by Africans' injunction.[13] Discussing the career of the postcolonial Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor, Táíwò insists that 'The essayist must own the ideas articulated in the essay; the voice cannot be masked and the parentage cannot be farmed out.'[14] In sum, the essay can be readily imagined as an idiosyncratic, thinking-in-action spin on ideas that are presented more

[10] Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, pp. 32–49.
[11] T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 13.
[12] De Graft Johnson, *Towards Nationhood in West Africa*, p. 5.
[13] O. Táíwò, 'Kofi Awoonor: the essays of a humanist' in H. Yitah and H. Lauer (eds.), *Philosophical Foundations of the African Humanities through Postcolonial Perspectives* (Leiden: Rodopi, 2019), p. 140.
[14] Ibid.

methodically elsewhere, in effect bolstering the appearance of perspectival authenticity on which Gold Coast essayists' political credentials depend.

Yet, the essay's orientation to subjective as against scientific forms of knowledge is not so straightforward for the Fante intellectuals in question here. African self-disclosure in this particular but influential West African framework reveals precisely the priority placed on objective, systematic, and even abstract knowledge that most commentary on the essay form rebuts. Far from what Sophie Gee calls the essay's privileging of 'private, interior experience',[15] a substantial part of the Anglo-Fante agenda at this pre-nationalist juncture is devoted to positioning *their* intelligentsia's experience as one uniquely bestowed with objective capability. A section called 'The People' in Casely Hayford's *Gold Coast Native Institutions* describes the 'Gold Coast man' as equipped with 'the force of a logic which no decent British Cabinet can withstand',[16] and he later declares: 'In the case of the Gold Coast we shall appeal to the logic of facts, and shall not appeal in vain.'[17]

The overriding viewpoint shared by Casely Hayford, Attoh Ahuma, and De Graft Johnson is that the British are blind to the lived realities of the populations they govern, and need to be wrested from hubris by plain, unassailable truths. De Graft Johnson introduces *Towards Nationhood in West Africa* with the reminder that 'It is necessary to clear our minds of hazy notions and ideas in order to arrive at the truth about Africa. Facts, it is said, are stubborn things.'[18] For Casely Hayford, the official restoration of Akan self-governance is a matter of 'ordinary common sense'.[19] The distinction of the Gold Coast essayist is his cultivation of a public self that can serve as a limpid conduit to *things as they are*. In Attoh Ahuma's rendering, such self-evidentiary status is a matter not just of political but of moral and stylistic value: 'the easiest way to become civilized, refined and enlightened', he declares, 'is to endeavour at all times, in all places and circumstances, to remain a true-born West African – nothing more, nothing less'.[20] This collectively authored 'educated African' archetype is more an observer than

[15] S. Gee, '"Such opinions cannot cohere": Swift's inwardness' in D. Gigante (ed.), *Republics of Letters*, 4:1 (2014), arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/such-opinions-cannot-cohere-swifts-inwardness (accessed 9 August 2023).

[16] J.E. Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (1903; London: Frank Cass, 1970), p. 80, https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/documents?q=gold+coast+native+institutions+with+thoughts+upon+a+healthy+imperial+policy+for+the+gold+coast+and+ashanti (accessed 13 August 2023).

[17] Ibid., p. 127.

[18] De Graft Johnson, *Towards Nationhood in West Africa*, p. 6.

[19] Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions*, p. 99.

[20] S.R.B. Attoh Ahuma, *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 11.

a creator, more a spectatorial explainer of culture than one caught up within its flux. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, 'the fact' is the dominant episteme of the Gold Coast movement for self-determination.[21]

This duality of insisting on objectivity while striving to give voice to cultural uniqueness is resolved through Christian faith. Cultivated Fantes are meant to discern true Christianity from false, granting them the capacity to lead the empire to glory, both political and divine. Attoh Ahuma is particularly bold on this point. In an essay published in 1911 called 'I Ought: I Will', which takes its epigraph from Act 3, scene 2 of *Hamlet* (in which Polonius reveals his lack of moral backbone by agreeing to three contradictory views of the same cloud), he calls on his younger compatriots to be both discerning and morally courageous in the name of salvation. '[W]e should go FULL STEAM AHEAD', he entreats them, 'neither restraining the course of the great spirit within us, nor being dismayed in deed and word.'[22] The relative brevity of the essay form makes it an apt vehicle for announcing rather than fleshing out complex truths. An essay called 'The Moral Significance of Christmas Day' (1911) shows Attoh Ahuma skipping what he considers to be a needless debate about who or what Christ was, and instead immediately asserting His irrefutable role in Gold Coast affairs. 'The impertinences and irrelevancies of carping criticism cannot affect the joyful anniversary of the Holy Babe', he declares; 'The birth of Jesus is a notorious fact', made so by 'the irrefragable logic of history'.[23] This historical logic now points in the direction of Gold Coast self-rule, by which Christ's presence in the world will be ultimately disclosed.

Finally, anticipating De Graft Johnson's insistence on African self-advocacy, the last essay in Attoh Ahuma's *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness* links intellectual refinement to Christian calling and local immersion. 'The call to prepare has come to Church and Country simultaneously', he writes, before concluding that 'Intellectual initiative, independent thoughts and ideas, which have not yet appeared in text books imported from abroad, if at all indigenous, must be cultivated, published, and circulated so as to create a change in our environment and circumstances for the living soul of our nation to thrive in our midst and flourish.'[24] A locally vivified Christianity speaks to the world through its elite African avatars.

[21] See J.M. Jackson, 'The facts at the heart of the matter: character and objectivity in the making of the Fante intelligentsia' in A. Fyfe and M. Krishnan (eds.), *African Literatures as World Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 233–53.

[22] Attoh Ahuma, *Gold Coast Nation*, p. 27. [23] Ibid., p. 32. [24] Ibid., p. 62.

What I mean to suggest with these examples is that the Gold Coast essay in the early twentieth century, against a backdrop of longer, more 'academic' work by Anglo-Fante writers, advances the cause of Gold Coast self-determination by its authors' self-assertion as political and spiritual leaders and as men who are to a unique degree being spiritually led. This conjuncture is complicated by their emphasis on the conjoined 'fact' of Fante intellectualism and Christian calling, rather than on a profession of faith linked more intuitively to doubt, passion, or the unknown. Casely Hayford, Attoh Ahuma, and De Graft Johnson claim the authority of their African point of view by presenting it not as subjective but as objective; they stand as evidence to their metropolitan British audience of what they take to be self-evident about Fantes' God-given role in assuring the empire's future. In this way, the essay's widespread association with experience, standpoint, or voice – in sum, with the provisional kinds of knowledge derived from one's being in (rather than one's mastery of) the world – ends up fulfilling a higher mission; to be an essayist from the Gold Coast in the British Empire is to be a methodical and persuasive advocate for an undeniable spiritual force.

Anglo-African Rhetorics of Christian Persuasion

Casely Hayford stands out in a larger movement that puts the Anglo-Fante intelligentsia at the forefront of a push for West African self-determination under the banner of empire through his prolificity and formal versatility. In addition to *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (1903) and his second major treatise, *The Truth about the West African Land Question* (1913), he produced *Ethiopia Unbound* in 1911. Often credited as the first novel published in English by an African writer, this famously eclectic, essayistic text intersperses its central, semi-autobiographical plot about a Fante intellectual named Kwamankra with speeches, vignettes, and essay segments lifted from Casely Hayford's own journalism. In a series of lectures published in 1975 as *Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford: The Man of Vision and Faith*, the Ghanaian classicist L.H. Ofosu-Appiah classifies *Ethiopia Unbound* as being among Casely Hayford's 'main scholarly works'.[25] This is owing to its plainly non-fictional contemplation of pressing issues in Gold Coast social and political life, from a lack of infrastructural development to ambitious plans for a national university, complete with local-language curricula. Most relevant

[25] L.H. Ofosu-Appiah, *Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford: The Man of Vision and Faith* (Accra, Ghana: Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1975), p. 19.

to this discussion of the Gold Coast essay is its movement between such nuts-and-bolts concerns – lofty of purpose but presented in hard-nosed detail – and a spiritual realm whose transcendence of earthly concerns the author struggles to maintain.[26] *Ethiopia Unbound* deserves mention not only because it contains essays, but because it introduces the central question that the essay 'William Waddy Harris' distils, namely, how (or whether) to represent the direct experience of God through a rational and fact-extolling sensibility.

Its dialogic nature, as it toggles between emphasising evidence and professing faith, underscores the increasingly precarious position of the Fante intelligentsia in representing an African perspective in and to the leaders of the British Empire. If its members are to be convincing in this role, derived in no small part from their insight into the Gold Coast's potential for Christian leadership, then they must be attuned to Christianity's experiential contours. But this synchronicity is far from a foregone conclusion. Like his peers and predecessors, Casely Hayford is from a Methodist mission-educated family, a kind of Christianisation that was intellectually influential but whose bookishness posed barriers to widespread dissemination. Casely Hayford's 'William Waddy Harris', based on the life of the Liberian evangelist William Wadé Harris, portrays his itinerant preaching style as he journeys between his native Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and the Gold Coast, inducting tens of thousands of Africans into the faith through outdoor baptisms performed with only a rudimentary wooden cross, a bowl of water, and what Casely Hayford calls his 'tattered Bible'.[27] Harris could read English and Grebo, and though involved at different points with both Methodist and Anglican missionaries, he took his religious authority straight from God. 'He belongs to no Church', Casely Hayford writes, 'Or, if you like, he belongs to the Church universal of which the universal God is both priest and king.'[28]

There is confusion surrounding the details of Harris's life, but in the light of Casely Hayford's literary career, Harris represents what David Shank refers to as 'a new indigenous lay religious movement covering a dozen

[26] Casely Hayford's description of his main character's otherworldly sojourns in *Ethiopia Unbound* is invariably rendered in worldly terms that reflect the particular concerns of his class, such as when he notes that 'the teeming multitudes [of the netherworld] represented every kindred, race, people, and nation under the sun. It was a congregation of select souls, men and women who had humbly done their duty, and done it well, in another life.' J.E. Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound* (London: Frank Cass, 1969), pp. 55–6.

[27] J.E. Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris: The West African Reformer: The Man and His Message* (1915; New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), p. 10.

[28] Ibid., pp. 6–7.

ethnic groups and involving new patterns of unity in the midst of diversity'.[29] His mission was widely seen to mark a kind of halfway point between traditional, pantheistic, and animistic African faith practices and the monotheistic and theocentric tenets of Christianity. Harris preached against fetishes, or objects of traditional worship, but not against polygamy, for example. The quintessentially 'charismatic' qualities of his ministry challenge the Gold Coast intellectual's faith in objectivity.

In the essay, Casely Hayford narrates his own encounter with Harris in 1914 as a series of vacillations between persuasion and immersion, as he observes a mode of conversion that he does not undergo but nonetheless tries to recount in an experiential way in order to convince readers of its truth. The 'educated African' at this moment must speak for a new African Christian multitude, whose path to Christianity he does not, and perhaps cannot, share. For the author of 'William Waddy Harris', this entails using the essay form as a means of reconfiguring the nature of evidence, so that Harris is both factual and above facticity. This is exponentially more difficult to do given the otherworldly nature of the 'experience' in question. If, as Murphy writes, 'The essayistic substitution of experience for theory relies on the conjuring of the felt experiences of others through words',[30] and if we grant the sincerity of his Christian conviction, then Casely Hayford is faced with conveying feelings that his habits of empirical description can only approximate.

As Casely Hayford must speak for who he is not, his essay must convey the richness of a religious ecstasy from which he retains some narrative distance. The form persuades its readers of faith lived as fact, in which a life is but a divine receptor. The essay begins by announcing its subject's imperviousness to the place whose spiritual life he is changing. 'To the mystic who lives and thinks in the higher spiritual plane spiritual influences are ever at work', Casely Hayford recounts; 'Neither time nor circumstance would seem to have any bearing.'[31] In the same breath, he ties those spiritual influences to the 'common sense politics' of African self-determination and world progress: 'Humanity is in the throes of a new birth. And it does seem as if the movement will begin with West Africa.'[32] Quickly, however, the terms of engagement grow muddled, as the essayist searches for a framework that

[29] 'Harris, William Wadé' in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, https://dacb.org/stories/liberia/legacy–harris/ (accessed 31 July 2023).
[30] Murphy, 'Of sticks and stones', p. 81.
[31] Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris*, p. 5.
[32] Ibid.

can bridge his propensity for evidence-based assertion with the heightened spiritual state he seeks to represent. Invoking the educated audience to which all of his work is addressed, he parodies their demand for proof. 'Where is this God of whom you speak so glibly?' he imagines them asking, 'Demonstrate him to us; prove him. Until you do, how can we be sure?'[33] But Casely Hayford believes that he knows better, theoretically rejoining, 'That is hardly a frame of mind for divine intuition.'[34] He repeats, 'The soul of William Waddy Harris moves in the higher plane', and then adds, 'This is so, if you accept the fact or not.'[35] Harris's transcendence thus finds awkward partnership with the very episteme – the fact, again – whose insertion into the discussion the essayist has been mocking.

The essay recounts an experience of West African religious life without its author's having experienced it at first hand, so that 'experience' is granted an evidentiary value that can be strategically manipulated by a would-be neutral observer. Experience, in a word, becomes a tool for persuasion as much as a standard for narrating what it feels like to be inside an event. To borrow Brian Lennon's terms from 'The Essay, in Theory', the essay is paradoxical in that its 'live-wire' or 'in time' quality 'requires, however provisionally, the re-creation of a position of observation extracted from, taken "out of," that time'.[36] The form provides Casely Hayford with a sufficiently constrained space to draw a tight contrast between a rhetoric of persuasion – narrated 'out of time' in the present perfect tense – and an experience of observation narrated in the present tense. Casely Hayford is not baptised and/or brought into an ecstatic state by Harris, but strives rather to capture the sensory dynamism of that experience in others' lives.

He moves from a steady argumentative cadence, marked by the phrases 'I have spoken of rebellion' and 'I have spoken of humility', to describe his subject's Christian tenets, into a faster repetition of this formula to describe what it is like to be physically in his presence.[37] 'I have heard good men pray. I have heard great men pray. I have heard souls in joy break forth into song', he recites; 'But this was a prayer peculiar unto itself. It was short. It was staccato. It abounded in fiery phrases.'[38] The paragraph that follows this pulls back from approximating the rhythms of Harris's speech, turning to meet his essay's readers in their scepticism as they are ushered adroitly towards belief. 'This man, who and what is he?' asks Casely Hayford rhetorically, before

[33] Ibid., p. 6. [34] Ibid. [35] Ibid.
[36] B. Lennon, 'The essay, in theory', *Diacritics*, 38:3 (2008), 71, 73, 83.
[37] Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris*, pp. 8–9. [38] Ibid., p. 10.

acknowledging that, 'His works, if they were done a hundred years ago and recorded for our information, few would believe.'[39]

Soon after contemplating Harris's significance out loud, so to speak, the essayist pivots to narrating a woman's conversion experience. His depiction of the scene is punctuated by exclamations of incredulity, reinforcing his educated bona fides, at the same time as it stages transcendence. 'There has been noticed in the crowd a woman who has attempted several times to touch the cross', he writes, 'and held back, as if she would rather not. See! She now gets nearer. At last she has touched it, barely touched it. What is this that is happening? Great God! Is it possible?'[40] He describes the woman's agonised convulsions, wild eyes, beastly roaring, and hair standing on end, until the prophet's prayer calms her, and he performs her baptism. Harris speaks in a 'strange tongue' that some of the crowd then adopt as a seamless response to his demonstrated spiritual power.[41] It is mistaken to call Casely Hayford 'an overwhelmed disciple',[42] as Shank does, given the deliberate rhetorical manoeuvring by which he brings the experience of the unnamed convert to life. The essayist himself is not overwhelmed, but relaying the experience of being overwhelmed. He is less a disciple than one who argues for discipleship, ironically by foregrounding the limitations of rational deliberation.

For this reason, 'William Waddy Harris: The West African Reformer' often seems to be operating within two incongruous epistemic paradigms. In reference to two Akan chiefs burning their fetishes due to Harris's influence, Casely Hayford remarks that 'it is not necessary for me to have seen either before I can believe'.[43] This dispensing with observable evidence fits uneasily in an essay whose most memorable segments are devoted to capturing the compulsive energy and sensory minutiae of spiritual experience. Conviction in godly force is depicted not as a leap of faith but as a mark of discernment, thereby implicitly restoring to the elite, worldly African observer a basis on which to claim affinity for forms of Christian experience that remain largely inaccessible to him. Just as *Ethiopia Unbound* grants pride of place in advancing democracy to the 'men of light and leading in Fanti-land',[44] 'William Waddy Harris' shows the Christian prophet 'leading *them* to fountains of living water. He is doing all this now. And the wise will know and understand.'[45]

[39] Ibid. [40] Ibid., p. 11. [41] Ibid., p. 12.
[42] D.A. Shank, 'The prophet Harris: a historiographical and bibliographical survey', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 14:2 (1983), 130.
[43] Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris*, p. 12.
[44] Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, p. 15.
[45] Casely Hayford, *William Waddy Harris*, p. 12, emphasis added.

The unlikely similarities between scientific inquiry – charting a course of action based on rigorous observation – and the wisdom that accompanies knowledge gained through faith, also connect the essay to existing Christian institutions. His work is not directed merely to increasing the number of West African Christians, or to winning the mission's glory, but 'to promot[ing] a spirit of enquiry; it is to stimulate earnestness; it is to cultivate a spirit of candour and truth; it is to test old methods in light of a new experience'.[46] Experience replaces evidence here, as the inarguable fact against which a broader sense of reality must be calibrated. But 'experience' in the essay as a whole is conveyed by a studiously informed kind of site immersion, thus crediting the wisdom of the 'African perspective' with a unique standard of observable truth.

[46] Casely Hayford, *Ethiopia Unbound*, p. 16.

33

The Short Essay in Context, 1870–1920

ERIC TIPPIN

The decades around the turn of the twentieth century constituted an era of transition, from rural to urban, from Newtonian physics to quantum physics, from miasma theory to germ theory, from diatonic tonal music to chromatic and atonal, from land travel to flight, from pre-industrial to industrialised warfare. It was also an era of acceleration in transportation, printing speeds, assembly-line production, communication, literacy, and education. The short periodical essay arose out of and in response to this context of new printing technology, increased urbanisation and impatience, and the acceptance of transience as a characteristic modern way of being. Many essayists in the period from 1870–1920 pared back the length to which the essay had grown in the previous decades, returning to the shorter form of the essay that had been common in eighteenth-century periodicals. They also recovered something of the playfulness of the early British periodical essayists, from Joseph Addison and Richard Steele to Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt, less common among high-Victorian essayists. These new, short, playful periodical essays were not an escape from twentieth-century modernity but a refined way of facing and thinking through it.

The materials, speed, audience, and ubiquity of the periodical press changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century. With the inventions of wood pulp paper, the rotary press, and hot metal typesetting; with fast-climbing literacy rates (reaching 95 per cent by 1900)[1]; and with improved distribution infrastructure, the number of British periodicals increased drastically from 164 in 1800 to about 2,531 in 1903.[2] The demand

[1] D.F. Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. xvi; see also J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 59, 65.

[2] For the 1800 number, see R.S. Crane and F.B. Kaye, *A Census of British Newspapers and Periodicals, 1620–1800* (London: Holland Park Press, 1966), pp. 200–1; for the 1903 number, see E.C. Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 3. For more on the essay and periodical literature at the

for new essays expanded with the market, and these new essays, jostling for attention in a crowded field, often appearing daily and weekly, were, as a rule, shorter, punchier, less ponderous, more effervescent, present-focused, and seemingly trivial. Ernest Rhys, editor of the five-volume anthology, *Modern English Essays* (1922), drew this conclusion: 'The short essay holds the field, whether its prevalence be owing to the impatience of the modern reader, to a feeling for concision in the writer, or to the effect of the daily and weekly press and the demand for an essay that is an article.'[3] Virginia Woolf's review of Rhys's anthology confirms this shrinkage, adding that 'demand for the light middle not exceeding fifteen hundred words, or in special cases seventeen hundred and fifty, much exceeds supply'.[4] While one could open the pages of the *Strand* or *Blackwood's* in 1890 or 1910 and find long, leisurely essays on cricket and clerical life or lengthy pronouncements on the duties of empire, the most anthologised essayists of the period habitually wrote short essays, which makers of anthologies, then and now, usually select over longer work.

The word 'short' refers to length, but it also has explanatory power as it refers to stature and quality – as in something falling short of some measure.[5] Woolf's appeal to the supply–demand nexus above represents the typical anxiety surrounding such essays: that they sacrifice quality to economics and public 'demand'.[6] The British essay between 1870 and 1920 did appear less towering, less philosophically and morally imposing, 'shorter' than what Rhys calls elsewhere the Victorian 'great essay', which could be as 'long as a novel'.[7] The new short essay would have been more recognisable to

time, see J. Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper', Ch. 25 in this volume.

[3] E. Rhys, Introduction to *Modern English Essays*, ed. Rhys (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1922), vol. 5, p. v.

[4] V. Woolf, 'Modern essays', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 November 1922), 770. This essay is actually a review of Rhys's five-volume anthology. The numbers seem to bear out the observation. Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*, first series (1865) averages 11,963 words per essay; Charles Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860–1) averages 3,847; Robert Louis Stevenson's *Virginibus Puerisque, and Other Papers* (1881) averages 3,301; Hilaire Belloc's *On Nothing* (1908) averages 1,695; G.K. Chesterton's *Tremendous Trifles* (1909) averages 1,496; Grace Rhys's *About Many Things* (1920) averages 704. Individual, anthologised essays by these authors follow a similar curve.

[5] For justification of this equivocation, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, *s.v.* 'Short', III. 17.a: 'Not fully attaining or amounting to (some condition or degree); not equalling (some other person or thing); inferior to'; I.1.g: 'In Biblical expressions, said of a person's "hand" or "arm", implying inadequacy or limited range of power.'

[6] Woolf is not being self-righteous. Her essay makes it clear that she implicates herself in this need to satisfy the market.

[7] Rhys, Introduction to *Modern English Essays*, vol. 1, p. v.

Addison, Steele, and Samuel Johnson than to Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, John Henry Newman, and John Ruskin. While newspaper column limits ensured its shortness in length, fin-de-siècle malaise ensured its shortness in comparative stature – or so the usual narrative has it. And that narrative is not altogether wrong. The characteristic essay between 1870 and 1920 is unassuming and light in comparison to its Victorian forebear, but this modesty and lightness, far from disallowing or crippling its thought quotient, are the unique conditions of a particular mode of essayistic thinking appropriate to the era. The short, light essay can do serious work in this mode, not in spite of it. The remainder of this chapter will highlight three characteristics common to the new short periodical essay between 1870 and 1920: calculated modesty, triviality, and immediacy. It will draw from the work of Robert Louis Stevenson, Max Beerbohm, Hilaire Belloc, and G.K. Chesterton, and will close by situating these essayists within the wider essay tradition of the period.

Calculated Modesty

One striking difference between the magisterial essay of the mid-nineteenth century and the short essay that dominated the early decades of the twentieth century is the relative modesty of the latter. Robert Louis Stevenson established, or reasserted, this *tradition* in his most anthologised essay, 'An Apology for Idlers', which appeared first in the April 1877 issue of William Thackeray's *Cornhill Magazine*. Stevenson is the most Victorian of the essayists treated here. His essays are longer, braver in universal assertion, and they often appeared in Victorian flagship periodicals such as *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Longman's Magazine*, and *Scribner's*. And yet, 'An Apology for Idlers' belongs in the company of later short essays because of the subtle, self-deprecating modesty that softens its sermonic pronouncements.

This self-deprecation begins with his title, which, invoking Samuel Johnson's *Idler* essays and persona, hints at a return to a more playful, eighteenth-century essayistic sensibility. The very idea of an 'apology', or *apologia*, 'for idlers' is incongruous at best, an 'apology' implying care, organisation, and intellectual labour. More generally, the production of an essay (a labour for which Stevenson received payment) implies industry, the very thing the essay wishes to dismiss as having secondary importance. Stevenson's homiletic sentence structure makes this self-sabotage easy to miss. He pronounces with dogmatic authority, deploying unqualified be-verbs and rarely using the first person: 'Extreme *busyness*, whether at school

or college, kirk or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality.'[8] However, it becomes clear as the essay proceeds that 'An Apology for Idlers' is, as Stevenson wrote to a friend, 'really a defence of R.L.S.' (Robert Louis Stevenson),[9] and also of a particular kind of writing arising from 'a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity'.[10] 'Idleness', as Stevenson defined it, was an orientation towards knowledge and the world, particularly native to the essayist. Still, the essay ends with what amounts to an admission of failure. Stevenson concludes with an invective aimed at 'scribblers who keep scribbling at little articles', no doubt aware that he is, as he writes this, scribbling a little article.[11] It is as much an indictment of 'R.L.S.' as a defence of him. His use of the periodical essay format allows him to turn dogmatic assertion into modest but calculated self-critique and a question about the future of the form.

Max Beerbohm's essays sit at the high tide of this calculated modesty so common among essays of this period, although while Stevenson cloaks modesty in brave assertion, Beerbohm cloaks brave assertion in modesty. Beerbohm was a caricaturist, parodist, critic, essayist, and novelist, well known in his time and successful in his literary career. One might be tempted to say that his success as an essayist belies his self-deprecation, but that would be to miss how much his self-deprecation contributes to his success as an essayist. He built his career on relentless admissions of inadequacy, and his self-stated literary ambitions too were, like many of his essays, 'small'. He entitled his first essay as *The Saturday Review*'s drama critic, 'Why I Ought not to Have Become a Drama Critic' (1898).[12] His essays perform self-deprecation with virtuosity, sometimes offering it as multi-layered and ironic (as in the title above), sometimes as simple subversion of his own claims (as in his 1920 'Going out for a Walk', in which he argues and demonstrates that the act of walking for its own sake turns a fine thinker into a mental 'wreck', only to admit as he closes that 'this essay was composed in the course of a walk').[13] Such moves promise to free the reader of obligations towards the content of the essay. In Woolf's words, Beerbohm

[8] R.L. Stevenson, 'An apology for idlers', *Cornhill Magazine*, 36:211 (July 1877), 81.
[9] See 'Explanatory notes' in R.L. Stevenson, *Essays I: Virginibus Puerisque, and Other Papers*, ed. R.L. Abrahamson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 150.
[10] Stevenson, 'An apology for idlers', 83.
[11] Ibid., 86.
[12] M. Beerbohm, 'Why I ought not to have become a drama critic', *Saturday Review*, 85 (28 May 1898), 710; See also M. Beerbohm, Preface to B. Lynch, *Max Beerbohm in Perspective* (London: W. Heinemann, 1921), pp. viii–ix.
[13] M. Beerbohm, 'Going out for a walk' in *And Even Now* (London: W. Heinemann, 1920), p. 193.

has 'no gospel to preach and no learning to impart'.[14] His gifts, in short, seem duty-free.

But Beerbohm can be more subtly homiletic than this characterisation admits, as he shows in his essay 'Laughter' (1921). It opens this way: 'Mr [Henri] Bergson, in his well-known essay on this theme [laughter], says . . . well, he says many things; but none of these things, though I have just read them, do I clearly remember, nor am I sure that in the act of reading I understood any of them.'[15] Like so many Beerbohm essays, 'Laughter' opens with an admission of failure, here of memory and comprehension. His choice of the phrase 'in the act of reading' over 'while reading', or some simpler alternative, characterises even his reading as a mere pretence or sham, an 'act'. Beerbohm's 'just read' points to another key move: time-space immediacy. The passage invites the reader to imagine the speaker sitting at a desk, brow furrowed, with Bergson's *Le Rire* open in front of him, as an alternative to the essay he is currently writing. And Bergson's presence as one who does comprehend only strengthens the contrast with the inadequate speaker of the essay. Beerbohm's opening, a model of streamlined self-abnegation, establishes in only a few words his lack of forethought, failure of memory, incapacity to universalise, inadequacy in comparison to his peers, and even lack of basic reading comprehension.

Yet, as Beerbohm's essay proceeds, he shows that he is cannier and more knowing than his opening admits. Beerbohm and Bergson both end their essays with gustatory metaphors, Bergson writing that the 'philosopher' who attempts to 'taste' the 'froth' of laughter 'may find the substance scanty, and the after-taste bitter'.[16] Beerbohm, in contrast, compares the 'laughter-giver' and the 'laugh-receiver' to 'a vintner' and a 'topper'.[17] Beerbohm's wine metaphor rejects Bergson's vision of laughter throughout his long essay as 'accidental', insubstantial, and 'bitter' – that is, gained at the expense of others.[18] For Beerbohm's speaker, laughter, like wine, is a product of human intention, rich in substance, and pleasant to the maker as well as the taster. And Beerbohm's appeal to the gift-economy ('laughter-giver' and 'laugh-receiver') rejects Bergson's vision of laughter as a process of objectifying and humiliating another person, offering instead a vision of subjects

[14] Woolf, 'Modern essays', 769.
[15] M. Beerbohm, 'Laughter', *North American Review*, 214:788 (July 1921), 39 (ellipsis in original).
[16] H. Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. C. Brereton and F. Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 212.
[17] Beerbohm, 'Laughter', 49.
[18] For 'accidental' and 'bitter, see Bergson, *Laughter*, pp. 10 and 136, respectively.

interacting and exchanging while remaining subjects rather than objects. It is not my purpose to defend Beerbohm's critique of Bergson but to show the force of it, made far more forceful by his modest opening. 'Modest' may be too weak. His claim that he has not understood Bergson is a kind of defence-penetrating lie, obscuring his attack on Bergson's theory until his closing sentences, by which time he has already imposed his own metaphors and his own theory on a reader unaware of his rigour and his seriousness. Self-deprecation can be a way-maker for a particular kind of thinking, gaining assent from a reader all the more surely by pretending that one has 'no gospel to preach and no learning to impart'. Of course, not every self-deprecating short essay between 1870 and 1920 avails itself of the opportunities modesty presents, but to deny them is to underestimate the form.

Triviality

G.K. Chesterton availed himself of the short essay early and often, though it could not be said of him that he had no gospel to preach. Chesterton built his career on metaphysical intrepidity and a defence of Catholic (first Anglo-Catholic, then Roman Catholic) orthodoxy. He was best known as a detective story writer and as a short-form essayist – two literary genres with much in common, historically and formally. The rise of the modern detective story coincided with the rise of the 'short' essay.[19] Both genres expanded with the periodical press and had a special relationship with the clock time of the city. Both interested themselves in the significance of trivialities, finding meaning in the detritus of the city – a railway ticket, a lost button, a scuffed sleeve. Chesterton, recognising this resemblance, titled his best-known essay collection, drawn from his weekly columns in *The Daily News* between 1900 and 1908, *Tremendous Trifles*.[20] In its preface, he admits that his topics seem 'trivial', but suggests that they are 'not utterly without a connecting thread of motive'.[21] 'Thread of motive' hints at detective work, 'thread' being the literal meaning of 'clue' and 'motive' being redolent of police detection methods.[22] That 'thread of motive' is his intention to see the significance in the trivial, to be an 'ocular athlete', to borrow Chesterton's term, able to

[19] See H. Shpayer-Makov, *The Ascent of the Detective: Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 236.
[20] One ancestor to this collection is Charlotte Lennox's 'Trifler' essays, published in *The Lady's Museum* between 1760 and 1761.
[21] G.K. Chesterton, Preface to *Tremendous Trifles* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. v.
[22] *OED Online*, *s.v.* 'clue', n.

write essays about 'a bed post or a lamp post, a window blind or a wall', much as a detective can solve a crime by noticing a raised shade or a scratched bed post.[23]

Chesterton's essays habitually take as their theme something apparently trivial or quotidian – a donkey, cheese, chalk, running after one's hat – and discover hidden significance in it, often revealing it in a moment of epiphany, like a detective with a turn for the dramatic. Discovery, or uncovering something already present but invisible, and the surprise that accompanies it, form the core similarity between the essay and the detective story. In Arthur Conan Doyle's story 'Silver Blaze' (1892), Sherlock Holmes solves a murder and a horse theft because he attends to the qualities of 'curried mutton'; the short essay promises a similar discovery when it attends to its trivialities.[24] And as in good detective stories, the thing discovered must already be present before it is revealed.

Chesterton displays this move from triviality to discovery in his essay 'A Piece of Chalk', published first as a weekly essay in *The London Daily News* in 1905.[25] His opening is familiarly self-deprecatory: 'I remember one splendid morning, all blue and silver, in the summer holidays when I reluctantly tore myself away from the task of doing nothing in particular, and put on a hat of some sort and picked up a walking-stick, and put six very bright-coloured chalks in my pocket.'[26] Like Beerbohm, Chesterton establishes his modesty by confessing to laziness ('reluctantly tore myself away from ... doing nothing in particular'), imprecision of memory ('hat of some sort'), and untidy habits (placing chalk in one's pocket). And like a mystery writer, he introduces key pieces of evidence without drawing attention to them: the chalk, most obviously, but also the important theme of colour ('all blue and silver'; 'six very bright-coloured chalks'). These two moves work in tandem, the self-abnegation cloaking the importance of the evidence presented.

The essay chronicles Chesterton's walk to the Sussex Downs, his sitting and drawing on brown paper with chalk, all the while reflecting on the significance of various colours – brown as 'the primal twilight of the first toil of creation'; blue as 'a score of forgotten skies', translated into 'the robes of the Virgin' by pre-Romantic artists;[27] white as a metaphor for the Christian belief that 'virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral

[23] Chesterton, Preface to *Tremendous Trifles*, p. vi.
[24] A. Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Smith, Elder, 1903), p. 7.
[25] G.K. Chesterton, 'A piece of chalk', *London Daily News* (4 November 1905), 6.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell'.[28] The drama and mystery of the essay turn on the fact that Chesterton is missing his white chalk, and 'without any white, my absurd little pictures would be as pointless as the world would be if there were no good people in it'. For a moment he is in a 'kind of despair', and then comes the big reveal:

> Then I suddenly stood up and roared with laughter, again and again, so that the cows stared at me and called a committee. Imagine a man in the Sahara regretting that he had no sand for his hour-glass . . . The landscape was made entirely of white chalk. White chalk was piled more miles until it met the sky . . . And I stood there in a trance of pleasure, realising that this Southern England is not only a grand peninsula, and a tradition and a civilisation; it is something even more admirable. It is a piece of chalk.[29]

In his essay 'How to Write a Detective Story' (1925), Chesterton writes that the 'climax' of a story should not be 'the bursting of a bubble but rather the breaking of a dawn'.[30] 'A Piece of Chalk' accomplishes this dawn-like revelation by discovering something in plain sight that had been visible since he mentioned the Sussex Downs earlier in the essay. As in a detective story, the apparent insignificance of the Sussex Downs in paragraph three makes their sudden importance at the end of the essay more surprising and pleasing. Chesterton accomplishes his revelation by an expansion from small to large. His first sentence ends with the diminutive image of chalk slipping into a pocket. The essay ends with the expansive image of a chalk land mass, completing the move from 'trifle' to something 'tremendous'. It implies that the trivial, essayistic topic of chalk has the significance of Southern England.

'A Piece of Chalk' also originated as a trivial object. It first appeared on page six of the Saturday edition of *The Daily News*, taking up only one column out of six on its page. And *The Daily News*, in turn, existed within a burying ubiquity of daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals, thousands to the eighteenth century's hundreds. Eighteenth-century periodicals built themselves around Addison's, Steele's, and Johnson's essays. Johnson's *Idlers*, for instance, appeared on the front page of each *Universal Chronicle*. On page six of *The Daily News*, by contrast, the weather report and the theatre schedule are more prominent than Chesterton's essay. 'A Piece of Chalk', like other contemporaneous essays, appears as insignificant and

[28] Ibid. [29] Ibid.

[30] G.K. Chesterton, 'How to write a detective story', *G.K.'s Weekly*, 2:31 (17 October 1925), 112.

ephemeral as its subject matter, and yet it has become, in time, a tremendous trifle – anthologised, criticised, and admired.

Immediacy

Another main feature of the short essay between 1870 and 1920 was its willingness to invoke immediacy and the moments of composition. Such immediacy had been a well-established tradition in the personal essay, from Seneca's remarks on the din in the baths below his room in his epistle 'On Noise', to Montaigne's health complaints and 'all this fricassee that I am scribbling here'.[31] The short essay evokes immediacy habitually, and in a way unique to its form and context. Beerbohm's admission that 'this essay was composed in the course of a walk, this morning' is hardly unique. Stevenson closes 'The Lantern-Bearers' (1888) with the celebrated call to look up from the page: 'Here is the door, here is the open air.'[32] Chesterton too draws attention to his own writing process, claiming in one essay that he is treating 'one of the most difficult subjects in the world' while 'dictating desperately to a typewriter in order to catch a train'; in another he claims that he is writing in blue pencil on wallpaper while movers take away his furniture.[33] Yet the immediacy of these essays is not isolated in rhetorical legerdemain. Their presence in daily and weekly papers gave them the immediacy of cheap paper, fresh ink, and the promise of tomorrow's (or next week's) number.

Hilaire Belloc provides a rich example of essayistic immediacy with his essay 'On the Pleasure of Taking Up One's Pen' (1904), which first appeared in the 5 November issue of *The Outlook*, having been advertised in *The Westminster Gazette* the day before as a forthcoming 'Remarkable Article'.[34] Advertisements trade on immediacy and operate on the modern, presentist conflation of the recent and the important. The advertisement touts Belloc's essay as much for being freshly minted as for its quality. And like the advertisement puffing it, the essay depends on immediacy for its effect, though of a subtler kind. Belloc attempts to capture the 'sense of mastery

[31] See Seneca, 'On noise' in P. Lopate (ed.), *The Art of the Personal Essay* (New York: Anchor, 1994), pp. 5–8; M. Montaigne, 'Of experience' in D.M. Frame (trans.), *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 826.

[32] R.L. Stevenson, 'The lantern-bearers', *Scribner's Magazine*, 3:2 (February 1888), 256.

[33] G.K. Chesterton, 'After the Milton celebration' and 'On being moved' in J. Stapleton (ed.), *G.K. Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution, 1901–1913*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), vol. 5, p. 229 and vol. 6, pp. 86–8, respectively.

[34] H. Belloc, 'The outlook', *Westminster Gazette* (4 November 1904), 3.

and of origin' that can be had in the small clearing between picking up a pen and writing.[35] Throughout his career, he often confessed to mercenary motives in writing essays,[36] so it is appropriate that one of his best-known essays should outline the optimisms and pleasures of beginning to write, as distinct from the act of writing, 'which is', he writes, 'quite another matter'.[37]

Belloc has taken up his pen to write the essay, but as he writes, he moves farther and farther away from his subject and its immediacy. The question becomes: if the real pleasure is in 'taking up one's pen' and not necessarily in writing with it, what is the status of the essay before the reader? Belloc spends the essay deferring this question with a series of false-starts, digressions, and self-referential snaps-into-the-present, including a slightly onanistic encomium on the pen with which he is writing: 'God bless you, pen . . . pen of justice, pen of the *saeva indignatio* [cruel indignation], pen of majesty and of light.'[38] The ironies here are too obvious to make explicit, but the important fact is that Belloc manages to maintain the sense of a beginning, of having not yet begun to travel into the subject, until he is near the end, when he executes a reversal that rounds off the gymnastic immediacy of the essay:

> The pleasure of taking up one's pen has also this, peculiar among all pleasures, that you have the freedom to lay it down when you will . . . . At any moment: without remorse, without anxiety, without dishonour, you are free to do this dignified and final thing (I am just going to do it) . . . You lay it down.[39]

Since the first word, the essay has had to work to maintain its self-referential immediacy as it moves away from its participation in its own subject (Belloc picking up his pen), but now it regains immediacy all at once in a neat reversal. With the new title he playfully suggests, '"The Pleasure of laying down one's Pen"', the end of the essay aligns perfectly with the essayist's own present, just as the opening words do – two perfect eclipses in 1,292 words.

Like Belloc's essay, the essay between 1870 and 1920 worked within the increasingly ephemeral present of the periodical press, which reminded readers of the date on every page. The 'short' essay made use of this presentist imperative, showing that it could be drawn into careful thought,

[35] H. Belloc, 'On the pleasure of taking up one's pen', *The Outlook*, 14 (5 November 1904), 411.
[36] J. Pearce, *Old Thunder: A Life of Hilaire Belloc* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), pp. 130–1.
[37] Belloc, 'On the pleasure of taking up one's pen', 410. [38] Ibid., 411.
[39] Ibid. (first ellipsis mine, second in original).

making the immediate universal, not by rejecting the present but by embracing it. Yet many scholars conflate the unassuming modesty, triviality, and immediacy of the short essay with weakness or vacuity. In doing so, they echo mid-Victorian essayist-sages such as Matthew Arnold, John Henry Newman, and John Ruskin, who disliked the diurnal, hurried journalism they observed as the century wore on. Arnold criticised 'new journalism' as 'feather-brained' because it showed little 'concern' to 'get at the state of things as they truly are'.[40] Newman levelled a similar but more practical critique against 'periodical literature', complaining of the kind of essay that caters to 'impatience': 'The journalist lies under the stern obligation of extemporising his lucid views, leading ideas, and nutshell truths for the breakfast table.'[41]

In stark contrast, Stevenson, Beerbohm, Chesterton, and Belloc not only accepted but welcomed as a challenge their status as hand-to-mouth journalists and their compromise with the hurry of Fleet Street, with eyes open to its dangers and faults. Stevenson chose to publish the essays later collected in *Virginibus Puerisque* in *Macmillan's* and the *Cornhill* at least in part for economic reasons.[42] Belloc defended the diurnal periodical essay in 'An Essay upon Essays upon Essays', maintaining that, despite the 'excess of essays', their 'level remains remarkably high' and that their diversity embodies the 'multiplicity of the world'.[43] Beerbohm claims that the 'obligation to write every week a fugitive article for a largeish publication' has made his writing 'more chaste . . . and stronger'.[44] Chesterton accepts his identity as a periodical essayist, writing in his autobiography, 'I always have been and presumably always shall be a journalist.'[45] His self-identification as a 'journalist' – a

[40] M. Arnold, 'Up to Easter', *Nineteenth Century*, 123 (May 1887), 638. Arnold's phrase echoes both William Godwin's *Things as They Are; or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), and Immanuel Kant's theory of the *ding an sich* (thing in itself) in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783). Arnold's use of the phrase combines Godwin's political and Kant's philosophical emphases.

[41] J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. M.J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. xlv–vi; Newman cites Samuel Johnson, himself a critic of periodical hurry, as one of the few exceptions to this rule.

[42] R.L. Abrahamson, Introduction to Stevenson, *Essays 1: Virginibus Puerisque, and Other Papers*, p. lxxi. On the development of professional essay writing, see P. Keen's 'The periodical essay and the rise of literary professionalism' and Shattock's 'Essays in the "Golden Age" of the British newspaper', both in this volume (Chs. 14 and 25, respectively).

[43] H. Belloc, *One Thing and Another* (London: Hollis & Charter, 1955), pp. 11–12.

[44] Quoted in J.N. Hall, *Max Beerbohm: A Kind of a Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 89.

[45] G.K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G. K. Chesterton*, ed. R. Paine (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), p. 281.

pejorative in the literary world, then as now – distances him from those Victorian essayists who defined their work in contrast to the 'new journalism' or 'periodical literature'. Nonetheless, Chesterton's self-labelling should not be mistaken as an admission of vacuousness or superficiality. He follows the above remark with a qualification: 'But it was not the superficial or silly or jolly part of me that made me a journalist. On the contrary, it is such part as I have in what is serious or even solemn.'[46] Characteristically, Chesterton presents a kind of paradox, that the modern essayist's embrace of a seemingly 'superficial' literary context is the very means by which the essayist can achieve depth. As in the detective story or in Freudian psychoanalysis, a careful attention to seeming trivialities can yield non-trivial results.

Whether or not Chesterton's claim is true is a matter of debate among essay scholars and writers. Some characterise the late nineteenth-century shift into the short, time-tabled, assembly-line periodical essay as an ebb tide, others see it as a flood. G. Douglas Atkins argues that under the temporal demands of the expanded periodical press, 'the wayward, protean essay very nearly died ignominiously'.[47] Graham Good objected to the pre-war essayist's willingness to relish trifles, painting the unflattering portrait of 'a middle-aged man . . . in a country house somewhere in southern England, in about 1910, maundering on about the delights of idleness, country walks, tobacco, old wine, and old books, blissfully unaware that he and his entire culture are about to be swept away by the Great War and Modern Art'.[48] The First World War, in this view, made the short essay both obsolete and ridiculous, like colourful military uniforms or a cavalry charge.[49] Accordingly, Belloc's 'The Barber' (1909) or Beerbohm's 'A Clergyman' (1918) would have merely historical interest as glass-case curios, not as timeless literary works.

Others, following Chesterton, see a kind of paradoxical stature in the short essay, complementary to Montaigne's protean essays. Michael Hurley argues that the 'pressure to meet fixed copy-length and deadlines – provided creative conditions particularly hospitable' to a way of thinking he calls '*semi-sequitur surprise*', the art of sudden and unexpected association of ideas.[50] In military terms, the short essay, unlike the entrenched armies of the First World War,

[46] Ibid.
[47] G.D. Atkins, *Tracing the Essay: Through Experience to Truth* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 67.
[48] G. Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. vii.
[49] Of course, successful cavalry charges continued through the Second World War, as did successful 'short' essaying.
[50] M.D. Hurley, *G.K. Chesterton* (Horndon, UK: Northcote House, 2012), p. 53.

could flank its reader swiftly, making up in surprise what it lacked in heavy weapons. With a little imagination, one might argue that the short periodical essay between 1870 and 1920 learned tactical lessons the First World War taught those who fought it: the futility of grand, large-scale frontal assaults against modern weapons; the benefit of mobile striking units; and the necessity of direct, uninterrupted communication up a chain of command. The periodical essay's epistemological lightness, mobility, and efficient communication, far from crippling the essay's ability to think essayistically, made it particularly agile in engaging with twentieth-century modernity.

Coda: The Short Essay in Context

The short, modest, seemingly trivial, immediate essay, pioneered by the authors treated above – as well as by Sir John Squire, Alice Meynell, E.V. Lucas, Robert Wilson Lynd, and A.A. Milne, among others – dominated Britain between 1870 and 1920. But other kinds of essays worthy of note also appeared. The essay as a genre was becoming increasingly complex and various, like the machines that printed and delivered it and the cities in which it was distributed and read. The genre included book reviewers such as Woolf, aestheticist essayists such as Walter Pater and Vernon Lee, academic essayists such as Jane Ellen Harrison, esoteric essayists such as Annie Besant, comic essayists such as Jerome K. Jerome, literary-critical essayists such as George Saintsbury and T.S. Eliot, environmental essayists such as Richard Jefferies, and travel essayists such as Edward Thomas. Mass literacy, combined with new print technology and the lack of alternate forms of entertainment (radio did not arrive until the early 1920s), made 1870–1920 a golden era for essays of all sorts. Writers made their names as essayists, including some, such as Woolf, whom we now know primarily as novelists.[51]

The most representative essayist of the fin de siècle outside the short-essay tradition was Oscar Wilde. While Wilde wrote many short essays in periodicals such as *The Pall Mall Gazette* and *Woman's World*, his most read, most characteristic essays appeared first in monthlies such as *The Nineteenth-Century* and then in the collection *Intentions* (1891). They average 11,670 words per essay (similar to those of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*), which would seem to place them in the Victorian essay tradition. But Wilde's

[51] For more on Woolf as an essayist, however, see R. Rainof's 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' and M. Wood's 'Undiplomatic relations: modernism and the essay', both in this volume (Chs. 34 and 36, respectively).

mode of essaying – paradoxical, wilfully trivial, irreverent, aphoristic, humorous – introduced a register that later essayists such as Chesterton, Belloc, and Beerbohm would adopt. Above all, Wilde's long epistolary essay, 'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis' (posthumously entitled 'De Profundis'), written during his incarceration for 'Gross Indecency' under the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885, gives an inevitable gravity to the form, which, like a Senecan epistle, explores a wide range of topics, from fin-de-siècle *acedia*, to the problem of human suffering, to the relation of the artist to his age. There, Wilde's usual paradoxes, self-contradictions, and aphorisms remain, only sobered and tempered by his own suffering.

Wilde's 'De Profundis' previews the longer, post-traumatic, confessional, and politically engaged essays that would follow the two World Wars, but it maintains a special connection to its historical moment. Wilde wrote the essay on thin, marginless, wood-pulp prison paper and addressed it to a former lover. It was at once seemingly ephemeral and seemingly trivial; it had a calculated modesty of appearance and immediacy. And yet, it managed a striking transcendence and permanence by way of those same qualities of immediacy, triviality, and modesty, not in spite of them. Wilde shows the form in mid-transition, merging the possibilities of the short, metaphysically agile essay with those of the longer, disabused, and self-consciously engaged form of essayism that would succeed it. Both may be considered direct and adequate responses to the challenges of twentieth-century modernity.

34

A Room of One's Own: The New Woman and the Essay

REBECCA RAINOF

Can the essay accommodate both pleasure and protest? This question speaks to a bind faced by women essayists from the Victorian era through the twentieth century, from George Eliot to Vernon Lee to Virginia Woolf.[1] Woolf herself defined an unease, verging on impasse, in her essays and her experiment with the 'essay-novel', a hybrid work she ultimately found unsustainable, splitting drafts into novel and essay, *The Years* (1937) and *Three Guineas* (1938). As she wrote in her diary about pioneering the new essay form:

> After abstaining from the novel of fact all these years ... I find myself infinitely delighting in facts for a change ... though I feel now & then the tug to vision, but resist it. This is the true line, I am sure, after The Waves – The Pargiters – this is what leads naturally on to the next stage – the essay-novel.[2]

The recurrent conflict she describes here between journalistic 'fact' and novelistic 'vision', and elsewhere between protesting and pleasing, defines the challenge experienced by Victorian essayists and fin-de-siècle New Woman writers working in the essay form.

George Eliot established the Victorian 'woman of letters' as a commanding presence in the publishing world, while the generation following her editorship at *The Westminster Review* produced the 'New Woman' as a complex figure of resistance shaping periodical culture. As Sally Ledger

[1] For Virginia Woolf, the terms 'fact' and 'vision' recur more fully combined as goals in 1933: 'I must be bold & adventurous. I want to give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both ... Is this possible?' V. Woolf, entry of 25 April 1933, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4: *1931–1935*, ed. A.O. Bell and A. McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), pp. 151–2.

[2] V. Woolf, entry of 2 November 1932, *Diary*, Vol. 4, p. 129. For the unpublished 'essay-novel', see V. Woolf, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*, ed. M.A. Leaska (New York: New York Public Library, 1977).

notes, the New Woman was a 'journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse' who proved 'utterly central to the literary culture of the fin-de-siècle years'.[3] Beginning with Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* in 1883 and Sarah Grand's subsequent coining of the term in 1894, the New Woman was a complex figure of political activism, reform, and literary experimentation as well as accomplishment.[4] The New Woman was associated with the advent of literary modernism and credited with inspiring a 'second generation' in the 1920s and 1930s, all while being a lightning rod for criticism and satire in publications like *Punch*.[5]

The span of time from George Eliot, through the New Woman's ascent in the 1880s and 1890s, to Virginia Woolf's modernism (a period extending to the 1930s in England) witnessed an unprecedented number of women entering the public sphere through writing. During this time, the modern woman of letters became established, partly through a growing network of women editors and publishers, and partly through the expansion of organisations supporting women writers in the public sphere, among them the Society of Women Journalists and the Institute for Women Journalists.[6] Women writers also found access to new political platforms in the form of periodicals run by institutions with different agendas, including suffrage papers like *Votes for Women*, published by the Women's Social and Political Union; *The Common Cause* (which became the *Woman's Leader* in 1920), published by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; and *The Vote*, published by the Women's Freedom League. Other journals in a rising tide of publications shaped by women and addressing the 'Woman Question' (the changing role of women in political, economic, professional and domestic life) included *The Englishwoman* and Dora Marsden's controversial *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *The Egoist*.[7]

[3] S. Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

[4] See S. Grand, 'The new aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (1894), 270–6.

[5] See H. Fraser, S. Green, and J. Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[6] K. Stern, *The Social Life of Criticism: Gender, Critical Writing, and the Politics of Belonging* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 129.

[7] Maria DiCenzo usefully clarifies distinctions between several of these publications: 'We have described publications like *Votes for Women*, the *Common Cause*, the *Englishwoman*, and the *Freewoman* variously as evangelical, sober, decorous, and iconoclastic'; M. DiCenzo, L. Ryan, and L. Delap, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals, and the Public Sphere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 198. For the history of Dora Marsden's publications, see J.M. Rabaté, 'Gender and modernism: *The Freewoman* (1911–12), *The New Freewoman* (1913), and *The Egoist* (1914–19)' in P. Brooker and A. Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural*

Yet, the literary place of women essayists as protest writers in this formative period, an era that saw the rise of political essays by women on a vast array of subjects, with a high volume devoted to suffrage and the anti-war movement, remains curiously opaque.[8] Woolf's essays reveal the discomfort 'high' modernist critics had in recognising journalistic protest essays as integral to an inherited literary tradition, a discomfort complicated by Woolf's own protest prose published in political periodicals. As this chapter will argue, and as Woolf's writing makes clear, the modern literary essay was neither divorced from nor defined against the protest essay.[9] Though Woolf insisted in 'The Modern Essay' that the essay is a genteel form that 'must lap us about and draw its curtain across the world', her own protest essays undermine this definition.[10] On the contrary, the act of pulling back the curtain to reveal the world became a signature gesture of the essay in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century (roughly 1870–1930), a strategy that women writers like Woolf both inherited and innovated.

The New Woman of Letters

When Woolf insists in 'The Modern Essay' that the essay must above all 'give pleasure' and 'lap us about', she presents the form as an enclosed and bounded space, a formal embodiment of a room of one's own, discrete from intrusive politics. Nonetheless, the curtain parts even within the confines of Woolf's short essay defining the form, for she darts out a qualification. To rise above the din of 'ephemeral sounds', the essay must do more than simply swath readers round. It must possess 'conviction': 'It is on the back of an idea, something believed in with conviction or seen with precision and thus compelling words to its shape, that the diverse company which includes

History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 1: *Britain and Ireland, 1880–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 269–89.

[8] For a detailed account of the rise of women writers publishing on these subjects, see F. Binckes and C. Snyder (eds.), *Women, Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1890s–1920s: The Modernist Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); E. Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (New York: Routledge, 1999); DiCenzo, Ryan, and Delap, *Feminist Media History*; A. Easley, C. Gill, and B. Rodgers (eds.), *Women, Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s–1900s: The Victorian Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[9] For more on the protest essay, see R. Baldacchino's 'The essay in the age of catastrophe' in this volume (Ch. 35).

[10] V. Woolf, 'The modern essay' in *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 294; originally published as 'Modern essays', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 November 1922).

Lamb and Bacon, and Mr Beerbohm and Hudson, and Vernon Lee and Mr Conrad, and Leslie Stephen and Butler and Walter Pater reaches the farther shore.'[11] Woolf insists that great essayists by definition convey urgent ideas, but they do so without readers feeling the insistence of factual evidence or ideological compulsion: 'not a fact juts out, not a dogma tears the surface of the texture'.[12]

The essay is presented as occupying the space of pleasurable distance (the 'swerve' or 'fall back' recently characterised by Mario Aquilina in *The Essay at the Limits*),[13] while simultaneously embodying a driving 'demand', as Rachel Baldacchino writes.[14] These and other recent studies of the essay pose the form's versatility as key to how it negotiates between politics and poetics. David Russell presents the essay as the embodiment of Victorian tact, a form that sidesteps and engages conflict at once, bringing the self and other into manageable, ethical contact via sensual experience.[15] Feinting, flexible, tactful, authoritative, coy, the essay of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain is personified as agile in navigating conflicts between androgyny and gendered authorship, high and low culture, power and non-violence.

Yet, in Woolf's essays we find that complaint, outrage, frustration, bitterness, boredom, and a host of other 'ugly feelings' all occupy a problematic space.[16] She derides voicing any groundswell of grievance as limiting rather than elevating women writers. Women's writing consigned to the ephemeral din often fell into two categories for Woolf: protest, particularly pieces addressing 'The Woman Question' and women's suffrage, and 'personal essays', which Woolf considered an inferior subgenre.[17] Olive Schreiner, a New Woman writer whom Woolf appreciated as a novelist, exemplified the first category. Reviewing *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* in 1925, Woolf wrote: 'Unfortunately for her fame as a writer, it was into debate and politics, and not into thought and literature, that she was impelled, chiefly by her

[11] Woolf, 'The modern essay', p. 221. [12] Ibid., p. 212.

[13] M. Aquilina, 'Introduction: Thinking the essay at the limits' in M. Aquilina (ed.), *The Essay at the Limits: Poetics, Politics and Form* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 5–7.

[14] R. Baldacchino, 'Otherness and the essay in the pacifist work of Vernon Lee' in Aquilina (ed.), *The Essay at the Limits*, pp. 125–36.

[15] See D. Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[16] S. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[17] Woolf's complex relationship to journalism, including protest prose and pamphleteering, is explored in L. Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism: Breaking the Surface of Silence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) and M. Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

passionate interest in sex questions.'[18] The personal essay occupied a similarly vexed position for Woolf. She disparaged personal essayists as seeking to 'indulge' their 'egoism to the full'.[19] Her critique targeted the genre in clearly gendered terms: 'You need know nothing of music, art, or literature to have a certain interest in their productions, and the great burden of modern criticism is simply the expression of such individual likes and dislikes – the amiable garrulity of the tea-table – cast into the form of essays.'[20] Castigating writers for occupying either the public soap box or the domestic, feminised 'tea-table', Woolf revealed an impulse to separate 'serious' literary essays from silly or seething publications by lady essayists, her judgment recalling George Eliot's warning about 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists'.[21]

In these assessments, Charlotte Brontë becomes Woolf's cautionary example of a writer whose prose seeps gendered anger, and she accordingly warns in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) that 'it is fatal for anyone who writes to think about their sex'.[22] This Brontëan advisory warning dramatically fails within Woolf's own body of essays. After all, she is the same person who wrote *Three Guineas*, her 'primer for protest and an encouragement for women to struggle' against 'male dominance', that Woolf at one point conceived of as a 'sequel' to *A Room of One's Own*.[23] Woolf's own history of turning increasingly to protest writing raises the persistent question, how can an essayist give pleasure and make demands, instruct readers while remaining tactful, playful, impersonal, and charming? How can anyone, let alone a woman writer in the period under examination, write a protest essay by Woolf's initial definition of the essay? The answer is that not even she could. Her repeated attempts to bifurcate definitions of the essay into aesthetics and politics, poetics and journalism, demonstrate how Woolf struggled to recognise women's popular political writing in the effort to

[18] V. Woolf, 'Olive Schreiner', *New Republic*, 42 (18 March 1925), 6.
[19] V. Woolf, 'The decay of essay writing' in A. McNeillie (ed.), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 26.
[20] Ibid.
[21] George Eliot [M. Evans], 'Silly novels by lady novelists', *Westminster Review*, 66 (October 1856).
[22] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1995), pp. 102–3.
[23] J. Marcus, 'Art and anger', *Feminist Studies*, 4:1 (February 1978), 88. The conception of *Three Guineas* as a sequel is mentioned in Woolf's diary: 'I have this moment, while having my bath, conceived an entire new book – a sequel to a Room of One's Own – about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps – Lord how exciting!' *Diary*, vol. 4, p. 6 (20 January 1931).

codify both the literary essay and, simultaneously, the place of women in a changing profession of letters.

The 'diverse company' of professional essayists Woolf explores in 'The Modern Essay' curiously includes only one woman. That this lone woman is Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) offers insight into Woolf's perceived bind between politics and aesthetics, for Lee represents this duality: she was known for breaking ground as a literary critic in a masculine profession of letters and for devoting herself to political writing on suffrage and pacifism. Lee's inclusion as a high literary essayist, with no mention of her political writing, must be considered alongside Woolf's other omissions, the most glaring being George Eliot. The writer and editor of *The Westminster Review* earned 'whatever we have it in our power to bestow of laurel and rose', but no mention in a roll call of Victorian progenitors of the essay form.[24] Rachel Bowlby and Christa Zorn read this omission as a move that served to establish Woolf's own position as a formative woman of letters in the twentieth century.[25] Margaret Oliphant, May Sinclair, Eliza Lynn Linton, Anna Jameson, and Amy Levy are also excluded from Woolf's canonising glance in surveying essayists of the previous era. Alice Meynell, whom Woolf regarded privately as a writer 'who somehow made one dislike the notion of women who write', receives no mention, despite having been included in the anthology Woolf was reviewing in 'The Modern Essay'.[26] This may have been due to her compliance with the literary marketplace. As Linda Peterson explains:

> De facto, periodical writing led to Meynell's *succès d'estime*. The literary field of the 1890s in which she worked did not operate by the conventional rules – in part because of its new fascination with the essay, in part because of an appetite for small, aesthetically pleasing books, in part because of the opening of the American periodical market – and Meynell's career reveals her careful negotiation of its various demands.[27]

[24] V. Woolf, 'George Eliot' in *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1984), pp. 162–73; originally published in *Times Literary Supplement* (20 November 1919).

[25] R. Bowlby, Introduction to Virginia Woolf, *A Woman's Essays*, ed. Bowlby (London: Penguin, 1992), p. xxvii; C. Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 180.

[26] V. Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals, 1897–1909*, ed. M.A. Leaska (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), p. 398.

[27] L. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 8.

More than simply revealing Woolf's taste or distaste for individual writers and her strategies of elevation that reflect back on herself, her pattern of recognition and omission speaks to the work Woolf saw the essay performing in shaping a class of 'women of letters' in the twentieth century.

As Peterson observes, it 'was in periodicals that the modern conception of the man and woman of letters emerged', the term 'woman of letters' itself being a 'Victorian invention' that took deeper root in the early twentieth century.[28] For many women essayists in the nineteenth century, the doorway to publication hinged on anonymity and pseudonyms, disguise being integral to the essay tradition from its inception. As William Hazlitt noted in 'On the Periodical Essayist' (1819), essayists following 'Montaigne and his imitators' likewise shared the 'unrestrained expression of their thoughts' but found that 'to discharge the invidious office of *Censor Morum* [moral censor] more freely, and with less responsibility', it helped if they 'assumed some fictitious and humorous disguise'.[29] Anonymous publication, in turn, provided women not simply with protection to express criticism, offer pointed reviews, and satirise freely – liberties of which male essayists had long availed themselves in periodicals ranging from *The Spectator* to *Punch* – but additionally provided a cloak for addressing topics that were not deemed 'suitable' for women.[30] This concealment allowed women to speak with the authority reserved for men, yet while negatively limiting self-expression and the potential for creating a body of public women's writing.[31] If, as Woolf insists in *A Room of One's Own*, that 'Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman', Anon stands as an equally apt, empty signifier for the woman essayist.[32] This was certainly the case when Violet Paget began to make her mark as an authority on Italian art and aesthetic psychology under the name Vernon Lee.

[28] Peterson defines the 'woman of letters' as an 'honorific designation' determined by one's 'economic success, critical esteem, and lasting reputation' and a woman writer's 'savvy negotiations in the literary market'; ibid., p. 6.

[29] W. Hazlitt, 'On the periodical essayist', *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Taylor & Hessey, 1819), p. 185.

[30] Fraser, Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, p.11.

[31] 'On the one hand, anonymity enabled women to enter the profession of writing without having to reveal their identity and expose themselves to criticism for engaging in public discourse. On the other, it often forced them to write ... from the "purely masculine standpoint."' Ibid., p. 27.

[32] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 48.

Vernon Lee's Protean Prose

Violet Paget's adoption of the pseudonym Vernon Lee is exemplary of the strategies many women writers adopted to enter print culture; but she is also, like George Eliot, an exceptional figure. She was well known as both a scholar and an activist. Her first tome published under the pseudonym Vernon Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), established her authority as a scholar at a young age, when she gained entry to a masculine profession of letters. Later she would pen pieces for *The Nation*, *The New Statesman*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Westminster Gazette*, but also for *Labour Leader* and *Jus Suffragii*, the journal of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance edited by Mary Sheepshanks.[33] Labelled 'too late to be a Victorian, too early to be a Modernist', Lee was, as Vineta Colby writes, 'protean': 'a nonmilitant feminist, a sexually repressed lesbian, an aesthete, a cautious socialist, a secular humanist'.[34] Lee's resistance to binaries went deep. Kimberly Stern characterises Lee as an '*anticategorical* critic' who made it a 'mission to resist social classification'.[35] As a writer and public figure, she rejected gendered binaries more stridently and deftly than many of her contemporary aesthetes. This resistance to gendering proved to be one of the reasons she hesitated to enter debates on 'The Woman Question', finally doing so in her essay 'The Economic Parasitism of Women'.[36] By the time she published this essay in 1902, her identity as a woman – but more specifically as a woman who resisted gendered identity as a public stance – was well known.

Woolf repeatedly gave Vernon Lee primacy of place as an essayist. In 'The Modern Essay' she included Lee as the only cited female essayist. In *A Room of One's Own* she further recounts:

> I had come at last, in the course of this rambling, to the shelves which hold books by the living; by women and by men; for there are almost as many books written by women now as by men. Or if that is not yet quite true, if the male is still the voluble sex, it is certainly true that women no longer write novels solely. There are Jane Harrison's books on Greek archaeology; Vernon Lee's books on aesthetics; Gertrude Bell's books on Persia. There

[33] Baldacchino, 'Otherness and the essay', p. 134.
[34] V. Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. xii.
[35] Stern, *The Social Life of Criticism*, p. 153.
[36] V. Lee, 'The economic parasitism of women' in *Gospels of Anarchy, and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), pp. 263–97. The essay first appeared as 'Economic dependence of women' in *North American Review*, 175 (July 1902).

> are books on all sorts of subjects which a generation ago no woman could have touched. There are poems and plays and criticism.[37]

The emphasis on Lee's 'books on aesthetics' seemingly excludes her political essays and pamphlets. However, by the time Woolf praised Lee as a high-culture critic in 'The Modern Essay' and *A Room of One's Own*, Lee had veered from writing about Italian art to writing prolifically about her most passionate political convictions: pacifism and women's suffrage. In this career arc, Lee's work embodies an inseparability of politics and aesthetics that Woolf denied in 'The Modern Essay', but ultimately emulated.

An early innovator in hybrid essay forms, Lee provided a formal and aesthetic model of what the essay could achieve. Anticipating further modernist experiments in merging techniques from the essay and fiction, she combined the impersonal stance of the critic and the embodied subject position of the protest writer. In her literary criticism, her philosophical conversations and dialogues modelled the slippery shape Oscar Wilde would later popularly adopt in works like 'The Decay of Lying' (1891). Talia Schaffer has suggested that 'Lee's dialogues and novels, which Woolf reviewed', have a 'flowing, loose style that might have satisfied Woolf's demand for a women's style that combined "freedom and fullness of expression".[38] We see this loose and boundary-defying genre on display in *Belcaro* (1881), *Baldwin* (1886), and *Althea* (1894), essay collections of dialogues rendered in the style of Plato's *Symposium* addressing subjects as varied as art history and psychology. These formally fluid essays allowed Violet Paget to don the persona of her pseudonym Vernon Lee, but also to speak through multiple voices and characters to render aesthetic judgments without fully espousing any of them as a definitive authorial stance. These philosophical dialogues speak to Lee's adoption of the essay as a suitably 'protean' genre to match her own authorial identity.

As she writes in her preface to the novella *Ottilie* (1883), explaining the interchange between fiction and the essay, the 'essayist is an amphibious creature, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl: something of the nature of a centaur' who often finds herself obliged to be 'tied up in the narrow little stable of fact'.[39] Rather than represent the essay as infinitely malleable, Lee contrasts essays to the flexibilities of fiction; the essayist possesses 'some of the

[37] Woolf, *A Room of One's* Own, p. 78.
[38] T. Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), pp. 194–5.
[39] V. Lee, *Ottilie: An Eighteenth Century Idyl* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p. 1.

instincts of the superior creature called a novelist' but is constrained to 'run along the beaten road of history'.[40] The essay, for this writer whose body of work consists two-thirds of essays, was necessarily a form whose bounds were always being pushed from within.[41] This principle is often most clearly displayed by Lee's political writing, which combined scholarly observations about art and music, extended metaphors and visceral images, exhortation and epistolary approaches, all to protest against the condition of women and encroaching war.[42]

As Zorn argues, even in 'The Economic Parasitism of Women' Lee turns 'the political issue into an aesthetic one'.[43] Lee reframes the central metaphor of parasitism not as one of benefit, but of entrapment within another's body; she protests against the 'sequestration of the capacities of one half of the human race, and their enclosure inside the habits and powers of the other half of the human race'.[44] The parasitism metaphor recalls biblical metaphors of Eve emerging from Adam's rib; Lee's images recast women as immured within a masculine skeletal framework, the male body serving as a metaphoric prison for a subsumed womanhood. This metaphor foregrounds women's immobility and men's contrasting physical freedom: 'man plays the part of the animal who moves and feeds freely on the earth's surface; and the woman the part of the parasitic creature who lives inside that animal's tissues'.[45] Commenting self-reflexively on her use of metaphor and imagery as a mode of persuasion, Lee concludes the essay by turning to classical sculpture to transform the parasite metaphor and frame questions of women's rights in aesthetic terms:

> And since I have used the word *image*, and have alluded to the grace and beauty, or the gracelessness and ugliness, of the women of the future, let me remind Mrs Stetson's readers that it is [not] just the most æsthetic, but also the most athletic and the most intellectual, people of the past which has left us those statues of gods and goddesses in the presence of whose marvellous vigour and loveliness we are often in doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena.[46]

This ending moves swiftly from considering bodies as imprisoning to an aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of the human form made divine through art. In Lee's reading, the 'marvellous vigour and loveliness' of Greek sculpture transcends rather than ossifies gender conceptions, vigour and loveliness

[40] Ibid. [41] Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 68. [42] Lee, *Ottilie*, p. 10.
[43] Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 87. [44] Lee, 'The economic parasitism of women', p. 277.
[45] Ibid., p. 277. [46] Ibid., p. 296.

being equally distributed between an indeterminate Apollo/Athena. In switching frames of reference from biology to art history, Lee calls upon her recognised authority as an aesthetic critic to call gendered binaries into question as socially constructed.

Lee performs a similar move of bringing together politics and aesthetic commentary in her anti-war writing, as in 'Après la mêlée' (1915), when she transitions from an aesthetic appreciation of music by Mozart and Beethoven to questioning the deep animalistic impression war makes on our subjective judgments, and how we might converge on shared ethics.[47] She claims that 'Bach and Beethoven belong no longer to "Germany", but to a vague Elysium of pianoforte Classics.'[48] To these examples, she contrasts a visceral contemporary response: '"German" is a word we all nowadays avoid, unless, indeed, we gnash or spew it out in pleasurable hatred'; she diagnoses this response as 'cases of emotional association . . . between things or happenings or their bare look or name, and a particular inner state of our own, making us say, "I love, I desire", or in the present year 1915, more frequently, "I loathe, I execrate, I abominate, shrink from or trample upon"'.[49] She proceeds to speak of 'desire, fear, or rage' as survival instincts crucial to the continuance of the human race. The movement in 'Après la mêlée' is from considering 'classics' as illusorily neutral creations, works sanitised of national animosities, to protests registered on the bodily and sensory level: 'How long, when the millions of poor mangled corpses have transmuted into horridly lush vegetation, how long will the silly evil words be continued to be bandied about . . . ?'[50] This outcry is directed at 'Dear Swedish neutrals', exclaiming, 'It is for you to help us!' – a technique that also sets a precedent for Woolf's expostulations and epistolary approach in *Three Guineas*.[51]

Lee's convention-defying and defining essays, inseparably political and aesthetic, modelled innovations and precedents for formal experiments like Woolf's proposed 'essay-novel'. Ann Ardis has written that the 'New Woman novel destabilised a familiar conception of the relationship between popular culture and high art', and Lee was at the forefront of this

[47] Another piece of Lee's for *Jus Suffragii* similarly reveals the associational and communal pull of music across national divides: 'These English and those German crowds . . . they are united in the same sequences of melody, the same woofs and harmonies'; 'Bach's Christmas music in England and Germany', *Jus Suffragii*, 9:4 (1 January 1915), 218. On the subject of Lee's associational model of empathy, Baldacchino offers a reading of 'Après la mêlée' in the context of Lee's response to Romain Rolland's previous 'calls for a peace settlement' in 'Au-dessus de la mêlée'; Baldacchino, 'Otherness and the essay', p. 130.

[48] V. Lee, 'Après la mêlée', *New Statesman* (19 June 1915), 250. [49] Ibid. [50] Ibid., 251.

[51] Ibid.

movement.[52] In this sense, Woolf owed much to New Woman writers, fin-de-siècle women aesthetes, and anti-categorial critics like Lee. Her recognition of Lee may not, ultimately, have been only for 'aesthetic books' as politically sanitised criticism, but instead for Lee's precedent as a figure who vaulted across formal, generic, political, personal, and artistic boundaries to create works that were undeniably new. Ultimately, in thinking about Woolf's own experiments with the 'essay-novel', it becomes clear that she followed rather than repudiated Lee's movement towards protest as a career arc.

Immunity and the Hybrid Essay

By the time Woolf wrote 'Why Art To-day Follows Politics' (1936) for the Communist Party's *Daily Worker*, she would not have resolved the impasse expressed in 'The Modern Essay', but her terms had clearly shifted. Woolf outlined what she viewed as an implicit contract between the artist and society that 'had been kept' in peacetime with 'lapses and breaches on both sides'.[53] According to Woolf, this contract in its purest form would allow for a separation of the artist from politics: 'Society has accepted the artist's work in lieu of other services, and the artist, living for the most part precariously on a pittance, has written or painted without regard for the political agitations of the moment.'[54] Yet, even in the most pacific of times, let alone those of martial escalation, Woolf admits that the artist often finds it difficult to be 'immune' to external pressures. She concludes that, although a separation might be idealised, art and politics are necessarily imbricated – a change from her earlier stance in 'The Modern Essay'. These ideas about the idealised immunity of the artist did not align neatly with those of *The Daily Worker*, which published her essay with an editorial statement of disclaimer that 'it is not entirely our view that she expresses. We doubt whether artists in the past have been so peacefully immune from the conditions and issues of the society in which they live as she suggests'.[55] Nor did this essay, an example

[52] A. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 42.

[53] The essay first appeared as 'Why art to-day follows politics' in the *Daily Worker* (14 December 1936), and republished posthumously as 'The artist and politics' in *The Moment and Other Essays*, ed. L. Woolf (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 225–8.

[54] Ibid., p. 226.

[55] Alice Wood, citing this editorial statement, reads Woolf's piece as evidence that she is writing 'more candidly and less reproachfully on the fusion of politics and aesthetics than at any other point in the decade'; *Virginia Woolf's Late Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury

of Woolf's more overt political journalism, rest easily in her *Collected Essays*. The fact that it had appeared originally in *The Daily Worker* was omitted by Leonard Woolf, the book's initial editor.

Nonetheless, the concept of immunity that Woolf broaches in *The Daily Worker* would be one she would return to in her late writing, particularly in the two works that arose from her experiments with the 'essay-novel', *The Years* and *Three Guineas*.[56] Immunity cuts two ways in both works: on the one hand, to be 'immune' reveals the ethical problem of indifference ('They're only killing other people', says one character in *The Years* after the passing of an air raid).[57] On the other hand, immunity is a position of ethical clarity, defining the artist's ability to resist 'the vicious circle of prostituted culture', as Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*, speaking to corrupting influences on leaders in cultural organisations ranging from art museums and universities to government.[58]

The first drafts of the 'essay-novel' appeared in early 1932 in the form of five chapters of fiction with inset essays on subjects including the need for educational and professional opportunities for women. These are subjects Woolf had explored in her previous speech, 'Professions for Women', for the London and National Society for Women's Service in 1931. Over the course of 1932, the drafted 'essay-novel' called 'The Pargiters' increasingly drew apart into two discrete works, novel and essay. By the end of the year, Woolf had written more than 200 pages of a novel that would grow into the 1880s section of *The Years*, a family chronicle spanning the 1880s to the 'Present Day' 1930s. The 'factual' sections, closely informed by her speech on 'Professions for Women', would become *Three Guineas*. In 1933, Woolf abandoned the hybrid project, finally recording that her 'essay-novel' was 'an empty snail shell', a literary form in theory but not in substance.[59] Yet Woolf's desire to write this hybrid genre in the first place, and the possibility that she achieved it in some measure in both *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, speaks to how she may have been seeking ways to scale a wall earlier erected

Academic, 2013), p. 119. Wood also discusses Leonard Woolf's omission of *The Daily Worker* in his edition of the *Collected Essays* in Wood, 'Chaos. Slaughter. War surrounding our island', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 76 (2009), 18–19.

[56] As Ben Harker has noted, Woolf's *Daily Worker* essays reveal how at many points she could not escape class, and he presents her essays as more circumscribed than her works of fiction that attempted similar explorations. B. Harker, '"On different levels ourselves went forward": pageantry, class politics and narrative form in Virginia Woolf's late writing', *ELH*, 78:2 (Summer 2011), 433–56.

[57] V. Woolf, *The Years*, ed. E. McNees (1937; London: Harcourt, 2008), p. 293.

[58] V. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, ed. J. Marcus (1938; London: Harcourt, 2006), p. 100.

[59] Woolf, *Diary*, vol. 4, p. 161 (30 May 1933).

between poetics and politics. The 'essay-novel', for Woolf, appeared to be not only a way to renovate the novel as a political art form, but also a means of understanding the literary essay anew as political too, offering at last a more expansive understanding of the capacities of the essay form to combine politics and pleasure, protest and lyricism.

In many ways, the vexed question of artistic 'immunity' lies at the nexus of politics and aesthetics that forms the substantive core of both works. In *The Years*, the word 'immune' takes on incantatory significance, echoing as characters consider the possibility of developing a 'New World', both in the 1917 chapter set during an air raid and the final chapter that concludes with a party in the 1930s.[60] During the air-raid scene, the novel's most continuously focalising presence, Eleanor Pargiter, provides a philosophical centre for the novel and a vehicle for Woolf's political imagination. She asks herself why she feels 'great calm' suddenly after the threat of death has passed, the air raid now over. In the midst of renewed safety, Eleanor questions her experience of profound relief: 'It was as if another space of time had been issued to her, but, robbed by the presence of death of something personal, she felt – she hesitated for a word; "immune?"'[61] This word reverberates in Eleanor's mind as she looks at a picture 'of a hill and a village' on the wall before her. These moments of considering two different significances of immunity – one connoting indifference, the other uncompromising engagement – open onto Eleanor's utopian questions: 'when will this new world come? When shall we be free? When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave?'[62] Variations on these questions also close the novel in the final dawn after the war has ended, when many of the characters are brought together at a party, including Eleanor and her niece Peggy.

Both Eleanor and Peggy might be called 'daughters of educated men', a figure Woolf makes central to *Three Guineas*. Born a generation apart in the Pargiter family, both are unmarried – Eleanor a Victorian spinster and Peggy a doctor and modern career woman. In the final party, they are destined to ponder the same questions about art and immunity. Peggy considers the word 'immune' while occupying Eleanor's recently relinquished seat in the 'Present Day' (an unspecified day in the 1930s). Sitting where Eleanor 'had sat she saw the telephone picture that Eleanor had seen . . . She looked at the picture of her grandmother as if to ask her opinion. But she had assumed the

[60] Woolf, *The Years*, pp. 292, 329–30. [61] Ibid., p. 294. [62] Ibid., p. 297.

immunity of a work of art; she seemed as she sat there, smiling at her roses, to be indifferent to right or wrong.'[63] Although they share the same physical stance and mental questioning, Eleanor is consistently presented as the voice of utopian renovation. Peggy, younger though more jaded, still finds herself drawn to the same questions as Eleanor, inheriting her physical subject position before an image. Peggy, by aligning herself unwittingly with Eleanor's philosophical musings, comes to question whether 'immune' means 'indifferent' after all – opening the possibility for a different kind of immunity in art, an immunity untainted by the motive to preserve centuries of masculine power. It is this vision of disenfranchised and, consequently, promisingly impartial women's 'immunity' that Woolf brings into sharper focus in *Three Guineas*.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf's most lacerating work of protest, she presents the 'daughters of educated men' as key to preventing war. These women are vested with the unique status of being 'immune, through no merit of their own, from certain compulsions. To protect culture and intellectual liberty in practice would mean, as we have said, ridicule and chastity, loss of publicity and poverty. But those, as we have seen, are their familiar teachers.'[64] Woolf here more fully reconfigures immunity as an ethical stance of impartiality, the effect of a long history of political exclusion. She then claims immunity as a position of power and of necessary political involvement: 'so long as the Church of England refuses our services – long may she exclude us! – and the ancient schools and colleges refuse to admit us to a share of their endowments and privileges we shall be immune without any trouble on our part from the particular loyalties and fealties which such endowments and privileges engender'.[65] The tone contrasts with that of Eleanor's musings in *The Years*, but the focus on 'immunity' persists as does the elevated position of 'daughters of educated men' as agents in envisioning a new world. In the connected moments of considering 'immunity' in both works, and of sliding between the word's different ethical valences, Woolf finally comes to define the role of politics in art more fully, and to present a renewed vision of women's protest as shaping the essay. These places where conjoined essay and novel meet allow Woolf to present the hybrid essay as a form that renders the woman writer powerfully immune – not from a world of political action that pulsates behind a drawn curtain, but from a pressure to keep that curtain shut.

[63] Ibid., p. 327. [64] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 100. [65] Ibid., p. 82.

35

The Essay in the Age of Catastrophe

RACHEL BALDACCHINO

The essay flourished in the 'age of catastrophe' surrounding the two World Wars.[1] Its powers were commensurate with unprecedented military and commercial interest in the fabrication of public opinion and widely pervasive spaces of reach for technologies of print. It was the first weapon of choice of the nascent War Propaganda Bureau during the First World War, on the one hand, and the transnational Peace Movement on the other. For being topical, polemical, and short, the essay became the 'one-man show' of public intellectuals and literary figures with powers of influence.[2] Using forms of the political essay such as the newspaper article and the pamphlet, essayists across ideological fronts like Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), George Orwell, and George Bernard Shaw worked literary sensibility into a writing from the streets, calibrating agitation and controversy with literary tact while delivering sharp focus on argumentation with clarity and concision.[3]

[1] The age of catastrophe spans the thirty years from the start of the First World War to the end of the Second World War. The term is borrowed from H.A. Winkler, *The Age of Catastrophe: A History of the West, 1914–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[2] G. Orwell, Introduction to *British Pamphleteers*, ed. G. Orwell and R. Reynolds (London: A. Wingate, 1948), p. 7.

[3] In August 1914, Prime Minister Lloyd George 'urged the importance of setting on foot an organisation to inform and influence public opinion abroad'. This organisation came to be known as Wellington House. It held its first secret conference to coordinate propaganda in September 1914 and was attended 'by a galaxy of literary figures', many of them essayists, including J.M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, Gilbert Murray, G.M. Trevelyan, and H.G. Wells. Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Quiller-Couch were not present but offered their services. See M. Sanders and P.M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914–1918* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), p. 38. This conference was Wellington House's first attempt at a coherent intellectual message in support of the war. Its main outcome was an 'authors' declaration', signed by fifty-three of the most prominent British novelists, poets, dramatists, and scholars, stating that the German invasion of Belgium was a crime and that Britain 'could not without dishonour have refused to take part in the present

Essay studies struggle to gauge the political essay of the interbellum, judging it at best a testament to the naive optimism of failed political movements, and at worst an act of civic irresponsibility, indifference to suffering, or outright violent propaganda. One would expect the vast essayistic heritage of peace movements of the interbellum to fare better as generators of desperately needed new cultures of non-violent political agency.[4] Yet pacifist movements across the two World Wars did not always achieve that agency, and the pacifist legacy does not have the validation of contemporary ecologies of thought because it continues to fail at deterring escalations of violence.[5] The pacifism of interbellum essayists like Lee and Shaw is nowadays read not with hostility but with embarrassment and the apprehension of naivete. On top of all this, literary criticism tends to judge militarist and anti-militarist essays of the interbellum as ethical and aesthetic failures because in being dogmatic and forceful they break with a fundamental commitment of essayistic forms to provide a genuinely relational space between reader and writer.

Such an essayistic space is supposed to be open-minded, non-authoritarian, peaceful, convivial, even hospitable, qualities essay studies usually attribute to the literary essay. The political essay, on the other hand, is more catechistic and didactic than conversational and associative, and it functions by closing down, rather than opening up, the relational space between reader and writer. It is characterised by an argumentative style of persuasion and an authoritarian voice, elements that seek to co-opt readers into a particular perspective, and at the level of propaganda to attempt violence on their

war'; J.M. Barrie, A. Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, et al., 'Britain's destiny and duty. Declaration by authors. A righteous war', *The Times* (18 September 1914), 3.

[4] Counter-propaganda to Wellington House came from the British Peace Movement and was spearheaded primarily by writers of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). Wellington House regarded the UDC as a conspiracy of disillusioned left-wingers of the Liberal and Labour Parties, but by 1917 the organisation had more than 650,000 members consisting of writers, artists, and intellectuals around Bloomsbury, Cambridge, and Oxford; the socialist groups of London, particularly the Fabians; and other groups of nonconformists in the north. Their aim was to establish channels of influence on British foreign policy and to circulate pacifist ideas through journalism, translation, and small press publication. Funds for this work came mainly from Quakers, and were used to distribute pamphlets, books, and magazines by affiliated authors such as E.D. Morel, Norman Angell, Arthur Ponsonby, Vernon Lee, Bertrand Russell, and Romain Rolland. See S. Harris, *Out of Control: British Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control, 1914–1918* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1996), and M. Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

[5] These positions are gathered and discussed in D.E. Howes, *Toward a Credible Pacifism: Violence and the Possibilities of Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009).

minds. Yet, this standard divide between the literary and the political essay is reductive and has hindered the development of a literary critical engagement with the political essays of the interbellum, stifling our ability to engage with them as important objects of historic memory.[6]

Assuming that the rhetorical power of the essay may just as often be used to defend truth and justice as to agitate for and justify violent conflict, this chapter will examine the crafting of relational space in the political essays of Rudyard Kipling and Vernon Lee. Both Kipling and Lee play with notions of essayistic hospitality to build connections with the reader in the highly contested and politically charged public space of the essay. In measuring the political essay against the literary essay, we might be quick to assume that rhetorics of persuasion, in their effort to rush for agenda, compromise a genuinely relational space. I suggest otherwise, that the political essay of the interbellum displays the kind of longing for connection and attachment that has long been deemed the cornerstone of the literary essay.

The Literary Essay: Open Relationality

The crafting of an open, hence non-violent relationality in the form of the literary essay rests heavily on the aesthetic of fragmentation. This is an attitude to form where – as in Brian Dillon's descriptions of the essayistic – thought, idea, and language are airborne, efflorescent, friable like dust, powder, sand, fog, rain, mist.[7] While fragmented essayistic writing is performed with exactitude, it remains tentative, evasive, hypothetical, fractured, and committed to becoming multiple. Its aesthetic integrity involves a commitment to a functioning whole that nevertheless remains unfinished. It is hazardous, adventurous, and with shifting, often opposed centres. In embracing fragmentation, it commits to a particular attitude to time, one that Walter Pater dubbed 'diaphanous' and that manifests in shifting rhythmic qualities, rather than fixed states.[8] Essayists chasing agendas and ideas were, to an essayist like Pater, insufferably violent and made for heavy, static writing that afforded 'no widespread life'.[9] From this perspective,

[6] On the false divide between the political and the literary in essays around the same time, particularly as viewed by Virginia Woolf, see R. Rainof's 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 34). Rainof also discusses the essays of Vernon Lee.

[7] B. Dillon, *Essayism* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), pp. 30–1.

[8] See W. Pater, 'Diaphaneitè' in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

[9] Ibid., p. 221.

political persuasion, advancing not only an argument but a larger agenda from start to finish with clarity and precision, would signal a fixed state conceptually and rhythmic failure stylistically.

A fragmented style allows the literary essayist to inhabit what David Russell calls a 'middle space in interaction' and to display a 'nondidactic reticent sensibility'. So as long as the literary essay remains an open 'ethical and aesthetic medium', Russell argues, it is tactful and, to that degree, non-violent.[10] As long as its stylistic approach invites 'the incorporation of difference', it enables 'an ethic and aesthetic of nonprescriptive inclusiveness' that rejects coercion.[11] When an essay goes the other way, by signalling competitiveness and the desire to win an argument, then violence creeps in textually. Russell describes this desire to force knowing upon the reader, to control the reader's experience, as 'a sadistic epistemophilia'.[12] Evaluated according to these parameters, the political essay will more often than not be found performing violence on the very nature of the essayistic.

Besides non-violence, there are other moral virtues associated with fragmented, non-didactic literary essayism: honesty, sincerity, wisdom, humility, integrity, and friendship, to name a few of the most salient.[13] Lydia Fakundiny, in *The Art of the Essay* (1991), writes that 'our aesthetic posture belongs inextricably and most deeply to our moral life' and, therefore, how and what we choose to write speaks 'to our moment-by-moment formation as human selves'.[14] So, for example, when an essayist, instead of writing downwards from a known agenda or backwards from a known answer, employs techniques of self-questioning, virtues are revealed that supposedly break with the ego, laying bare 'the writer's own vulnerability and complicities', and hence rendering the relational space more genuine.[15] So, while non-authoritative and fragmented essayism fosters a non-violent textual experience, it also has a way of signifying the virtue of the essayist as well as the essay. The implication is that the essayistic, in its rhetorical non-violence, is virtuous and that the virtue of form equals the virtue of the essayist.

[10] D. Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 115.
[11] Ibid. [12] Ibid., p. 302.
[13] T. Harrison, *Essayism: Conrad, Musil and Pirandello* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
[14] Cited in G.D. Atkins, *Tracing the Essay: Through Experience to Truth* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 63.
[15] Harrison, *Essayism*, p. 17.

This perspective on the literary essay reveals a deep desire for sincerity, truth telling (or at least untruths ironical enough to tell us something about truth), candour, and historical and biographical fidelity. The speaking voice in the essay is burdened with a 'representation of embodied truth' and the expectation that it transparently conveys the 'experiencing, reflecting, and narrating self'.[16] In 'The Modern Essay' (1925) Virginia Woolf suggests that we mostly look for and care about personality in an essay.[17] We want a direct channel of access to the essayist through the essayistic persona. Fiction cannot offer that access, at least not in the same way. However, even if the essay seeks a non-authoritarian and fragmented style to ensure a non-violent textual space, a certain ideology is communicated: that there can be a direct channel of access between people and that an ultimate truth of sorts exists. It presupposes that the essay is genuine and genuinely relational.

Rhetoric vs. Relationality: The Political Essay

If a meaningful connection between writer and reader has long been deemed a central goal of the essayistic, in 'The Child in the House' (1895), Walter Pater describes the task of the essayist as the creation of 'a sympathetic link' between writer and 'actual, feeling, living objects; a protest in favour of real men and women against mere grey, unreal abstractions'.[18] This sympathetic link creates the conditions for many things to happen in the literary essay, among them a connection that enables an idea and therefore also an (often hidden) agenda to travel forward. Lee comments on the importance of meaningful connection to the life of an idea in her essay 'Emerson as a Teacher of Latter-Day Tendencies' (1908), which establishes a link between 'action and reaction, give and take, between reader and writer' and 'the value of the ideas' generated through such connection.[19] From this perspective, a troubled connection between reader and writer suffocates ideas and the manifestation of meaning while open channels of feeling drive them forward. Lee expounds on this in her essay:

> The relation between writer and reader, where such really exists, implies the originating of ideas and states of feeling such as did not exist in either reader

[16] Ibid, p. 148.
[17] V. Woolf, 'The modern essay' in *The Common Reader: First Series*, ed. A. McNeillie (1925; London: Harcourt Brace, 1986), p. 216.
[18] Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 3.
[19] V. Lee, 'Emerson as a teacher of latter-day tendencies' in *Gospels of Anarchy, and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 44.

> or writer taken singly, the latent peculiarities of the one being vitalised and altered by the fruitful contact of the other. The thought, the feeling thus generated may be far from uncommon, and may be short-lived and comparatively barren; but it is an organic particle of that vast, fluctuating mass of spiritual life whence all thought and all feeling arise, and without which the most creative minds could not create, or, could they create, would be creative to no purpose.[20]

What this means for the political essay, for propaganda even, is that persuasion only fully succeeds in an environment where the family of ideas and arguments sustaining an agenda may continue to flourish. And ideas only flourish where language and form work to vitalise the relation between reader and writer. Ideas grow to sustain the impact of persuasion where there is a clear and direct writerly investment in crafting 'states of feeling' and 'fruitful contact' and thereby ensuring that the relation between writer and reader 'really exists'. Read with the political essay in mind, this passage is particularly striking because it proposes that the quality of the attachment between writer and reader goes on to determine the rhetorical effectiveness of the essay.

Essay theory addresses the workings of attachment in the political essay in terms of conflict. The reading experience of essays of persuasion, or essays that demand that the reader follow and submit to an agenda (sometimes hidden, but more often than not overt) is seen 'as a kind of war, where the author's textual strategies and the reader's reading strategies confront each other in a continuous battle', as Kuisma Korhonen writes.[21] Similarly, the reader is seen as the 'target for the manipulative strategies of the author'.[22] In the face of such manipulation, the reader either gives in to persuasion or resists it. As Korhonen writes, 'either the reader loses his position as a genuine subject or the author loses her persuasive authority – readers' reactions always remain secondary to authors' textual strategies'.[23] If we apply this to the political essay, we must necessarily assume that for persuasion to succeed, for agenda to manifest, and for propaganda to be effective, the author must manipulate the reader with rhetorical strategies.

But as ancient rhetoricians themselves knew, placing a speaker and their audience in conflict does not always serve an agenda. The dynamics of conflict in the essay are well expounded by Russell, who shows that opposed binaries

[20] Ibid., pp. 43–4.
[21] K. Korhonen, *Textual Friendship: The Essay as Impossible Encounter from Plato and Montaigne to Levinas and Derrida* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2006), p. 100.
[22] Ibid., p. 67. [23] Ibid.

do not afford the growth of ideas or the interpersonal relations that essays of persuasion and even of propaganda depend on for mobilising not the one, but the many.[24] An essay that draws the dividing lines of a conflict will, for better or for worse, suffer from the sterility of controversy. It may catch attention but in its reductivism cannot promote the growth of ideas. Consider, for example, an article that Lee wrote for *The New York Nation* in response to H.G. Wells's 'Appeal to the American People' (1914) to disallow the transfer of German ships under the American flag.[25] In a clash that received wide public attention, and one that severed Lee's ties with Wells and estranged her from many others, Lee's message to the Americans was to dismiss the 'idealistic, utopistic, mythopoeic self-righteousness' of Wells in an essay that asks 'America to deprive Germany of food for the speedier coming of the kingdom of peace'.[26] Lee opposed Wells's proposed tactics and sought to end hostilities 'not by destroying Germany and driving her to military reorganisation' but by 'staying the hand of covetousness, of race enmity, and of fear'.[27]

In Lee's response to Wells, and in her other essays on war such as 'The Educational Disadvantages of Compulsory Military Service' (1913) and 'Militarists against Militarism' (1915), literary style operates within the confines of political urgency – urgency of protest, proposal, and unofficial history propelled by the density, rigour, and forcefulness of language, rhythm, argument, and idea.[28] For movement between minds to take place, for persuasion to function, the reader is tasked with the demand of moving fast and staying firmly onboard the closed structure of ideas. But the pressures of this demand can strain the possibility of a meaningful connection between reader and writer, and in so doing injure both the relational space in which the essay can be most effective, and the afterlife of any idea that emerges from it.

Rudyard Kipling: Essayist as Host

The essay has always been a hospitable form. If, borrowing from the language of hospitality, we consider the political essay as home to a closed

[24] See Russell, *Tact*, ch. 3.
[25] H.G. Wells, 'Appeal to the American people', *Daily Chronicle* (24 August 1914).
[26] V. Lee cited in P. Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 204.
[27] Ibid.
[28] V. Lee, 'The educational disadvantages of compulsory military service', *Westminster Gazette* (1 October 1913), 1–2; 'Militarists against militarism', *Labour Leader*, 12 (1 April 1915), 3. For more on Lee as an essayist, see Rainof, 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay', in this volume.

set of intentions, then persuasion would rest primarily with the qualities of the writer as a convincing host.[29] George Orwell argues that 'communicative force' and 'putative artistry' in heavily rhetorical forms derive from four defining features: individuality, urgency, wide public appeal, and polemical intent.[30] But the 'inventional resourcefulness' and 'dispositional distinctiveness and stylistic liveliness' that push forth the agenda rest primarily on how much of the writer and their outlook is present in the text, and on how much the position in the text is theirs rather than the official line of an organised movement, group, or committee.[31] The persuasive effectiveness of a political essay – its style, arrangement, and scope, its subject matter and main lines of argument – are led by the spirit of personality. The greater the individuality of the essayist on display, the more convincing the host. The strength and originality of voice also contribute to the sense of timelessness in an essay, and likewise to the literariness of the political essay in the age of catastrophe.

Let us take as an example Kipling's 'The Men at Work' (1914), which takes as its subject the training of the first Kitchener Army of volunteers at the North Camp in Aldershot, Surrey. The essay was first published in *The Daily Telegraph* in the first autumn of the First World War, following Kipling's visit to the military town south of Basingstoke Canal, and then as part of a collection of six essays in *The New Army in Training* (1915).[32] Kipling's essayist invites us on a drive with individual units through barracks and parade grounds covered with troops: 'rises and sky-lines were furred with them, and the length of the roads heaved and rippled like bicycle-chains with blocks of men on the move'.[33] Bits of dialogue boom across bunkers between sergeants, inspectors, and company officers, and between the essayist and the men he meets, among them, a 'grey-haired military policeman' and an old veteran soldier 'cherishing a sore toe'.[34] We are asked to take note of men learning to handle military equipment, or miners twiddling 'their rifles as one twiddles walking-sticks'.[35] We encounter men marching, at military drills, and at meal times. Kipling emphasises what they sound like, their different tones and accents, as they 'grunted, barked, yapped, expostulated, and, in rare cases, purred, as the lines broke and formed and wheeled over

[29] In *Textual Friendship*, Korhonen proposes the language of hospitality to investigate rhetorical dynamics and the relation between the speaker and the hearer of a text.
[30] G. Orwell cited in R.S. Pomeroy, '"To push the world": Orwell and the rhetoric of pamphleteering', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 17:4 (1987), 391–2.
[31] Ibid. [32] R. Kipling, *New Army in Training* (London: Macmillan, 1915).
[33] R. Kipling, 'The men at work' in ibid., p. 1. [34] Ibid., pp. 1–3. [35] Ibid., p. 4.

the vast maidan'.[36] We are invited to observe a general mood of focus, courage, conviviality, and determination marked by small mishaps: '"But I've called you once!" he snapped at a man in leggings. "But I'm Clarke Two," was the virtuous reply. "Oh, you are, are you?" He pencilled the correction with a scornful mouth, out of one corner of which he added, "'Sloppy' Clarke! You're all Clarkes or Watsons to-day."'[37] This invitation into Kitchener's volunteer army is suffused with camaraderie in light banter and tomfoolery. The power dynamics between scolder and scolded are made to feel harmless, the reprimand simultaneous with self-correction. War chores feel regular as a training camp comes to feel like home in the relational space of an essay in which the essayist serves as host.

Vernon Lee has written extensively about the ways in which militarist propaganda is invested in the fabrication of a national unanimity upon which depends the 'greatest possible output of defensive effort'.[38] Kipling's 'mythopoeic efficacy' is crafted almost entirely on his ability to pass whatever he witnesses through the filter of the illusion of a collectivity in which the feelings and behaviours of the one become the feelings and behaviours of the many.[39] And yet the primary vehicle of Kipling's political essays is not direct appeal or forceful argumentation but pleasure in the essay as an inviting space, a home. His officers are nurturing and 'seem as mother-keen on their men as their men are brother-fond of them'.[40]

In Kipling's 'On the Frontier of Civilisation' (1915), the soldiers he invites us to see are festive at mealtime: '"Come and look at our mess. It's the Ritz of these parts." And they joyously told how they had got, or procured, the various fittings and the elegancies, while hands stretched out of the gloom to shake, and men nodded welcome and greeting all through that cheery brotherhood in the woods.'[41] Kipling describes an observation post as 'a rustic shelter', much like a treehouse, but 'always of the tea-garden pattern, a table, a map and a little window wreathed with living branches'.[42] It has the homey, vine-covered feel of a cottage, though Kipling calls them 'little chalets of a rustic nature', equipped for tea time and suggesting 'tea-gardens in England'.[43] Kipling's essayist-host takes pleasure in the visit to the military

[36] Ibid., p. 2. [37] Ibid.
[38] I am drawing here on Vernon Lee's expansive notes on the rhetorics of propaganda in the First World War in *Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes and Introduction* (London: John Lane, 1920), p. xxiv.
[39] Ibid., p. xxvii.
[40] R. Kipling, 'On the frontier of civilisation' in *France at War* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 12. The essay was first published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 6 September 1915.
[41] Ibid., pp. 14. [42] Ibid., p. 8. [43] Ibid., p. 7.

men, and by extension so does the reader. The everyday normalities of the men at work, their 'little excursions' and 'small observations' (as E.B. White puts it in a foreword to a collection of his own essays) are enticing.[44] The light forays into squabble or difference deflect from large-scale chaos to domestic comfort.

Consider how two tropes of Kipling's political essays – able-bodied men and what they wear (clothes, accoutrements, uniform) – function to perform this deflection from chaos to comfort in 'The Men at Work':

> They were clad in a blue garb that disguised all contours; yet their shoulders, backs, and loins could not altogether be disguised, and these were excellent. Another company, at physical drill in shirt and trousers, showed what superb material had offered itself to be worked upon, and how much poise and directed strength had been added to that material in the past few months. When the New Army gets all its new uniform, it will gaze at itself like a new Narcissus. But the present kit is indescribable. That is why, English fashion, it has been made honourable by its wearers; and our world in the years to come will look back with reverence as well as affection on those blue slops and that epileptic cap. One far-seeing commandant who had special facilities has possessed himself of brass buttons, thousands of 'em, which he has added to his men's outfit for the moral effect of (*a*) having something to clean, and (*b*) of keeping it so. It has paid.[45]

The phrasing and sentence movement here are inviting because they are alive with concrete nouns and active verbs. The syntactical patterns are pleasing because they are simple. The tone is familiar and friendly. The voice of the essayist emerges as a hospitable guide through backstage wartime. He is a convincing host because of that distinctive tool of the essayistic that Orwell describes as the 'ability to speak to the ordinary man in words that he will understand and respond to'.[46] These essayistic elements come to shape what Korhonen describes as the convincing ethos of a convincing host.[47] Kipling is keen to uphold this persona, for upon it depends his persuasive authority and mythologising propaganda.

Fully aware of the vast amounts of capital invested in wartime propaganda that shaped the First World War as a people's war, and also of information fatigue on the part of that people, Kipling turns his political essay into a space of refuge. The public world surrounding his essays was crowded, noisy,

[44] E.B. White, Foreword to *Essays of E.B. White* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1979), p. viii.
[45] Kipling, 'The men at work', p. 5.
[46] Orwell cited in Pomeroy, 'To push the world', p. 398.
[47] Korhonen, *Textual Friendship*, p. 100.

suffocating, frantic, anxious: 'a true deluge of questions flooded the publicistic realm and saturated political rhetoric'.[48] We might compare the warring communities of the political essay in the age of catastrophe to the audience at the yearly town pageant in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), immersed in the chaos and speechifying on the chaos that is history in the making. That audience is caught in confused paralysis: they 'saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still'.[49] There is nothing for them to do but watch: 'We remain seated – We are the audience.'[50] Kipling's militarist essayism responds to this crisis-induced stupor, or what Holly Case describes as 'a sensibility that spun into a rhythmic, increasingly detached automatism', by recreating the comforts of home.[51]

In contexts where feelings are predominantly bound to the cause and effects of war, and where it is hard for an individual to cling to personal beliefs, home is a space to reconnect with emotions buried in the particular. Kipling provides relational space for such attachment by employing the sounds and movements of ordinary men going about their daily routine and through the scattering of domestic objects in their working quarters (from bicycles, to shirts, leggings, trousers, walking-sticks, buttons, and pencils). Whilst the war brutalised the streets with bloodshed and slaughter, the men at work on Kipling's roads comfort readers with negligible ailments like a sore toe and the familiar signs of old age.

Kipling is also aware that in contexts of fear and suffering people find solace in belonging to a clearly defined 'inside' as opposed to the 'outside'. He responds to this knowledge by investing his political essays with symbolic thresholds, points of entry, sites of exit, loci of retreat, and hiding places, carefully signposting delineations between the home he is welcoming his reader into and what he is choosing to leave outside. In his 'On the Frontier of Civilisation', for example, an assault on a town in the French countryside becomes an assault on the structures and materials of an English home:

> It is not seemly that rooms should be torn out of the sides of buildings as one tears the soft heart out of English bread; that villa roofs should lie across iron gates of private garages, or that drawing-room doors should flap alone and disconnected between two emptinesses of twisted girders. The eye wearies

[48] H. Case, *The Age of Questions: or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century and Beyond* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 212.

[49] V. Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 110.

[50] Ibid., p. 38.

[51] Case, *The Age of Questions*, p. 183.

> of the repeated pattern that burst shells make on stone walls, as the mouth sickens of the taste of mortar and charred timber. One quarter of the place had been shelled nearly level; the facades of the houses stood doorless, roofless, and windowless like stage scenery.[52]

This description of domestic fragmentation across the Channel – rooms, sides of buildings, roofs, gates, flapping doors, stone walls, and soft bread – contrasts with readerly thoughts of home as a space where basic needs of shelter and nurture are met. From the French ruins emerge thoughts of ease and belonging in English readers. Kipling's political essays in general, by destressing the relational space of the essay, drive home its propaganda.

Vernon Lee's Inhospitable Essays

Vernon Lee's essays on war are not bent on the seductions of hospitality in the manner that Kipling's are. Where they attempt to accommodate the spirit of hospitality, friendship, and conviviality, they do so hesitatingly, awkwardly, and hurriedly. Her 'War the Grave of All Good', published in *The Labour Leader* on 28 October 1915, commemorates the second All Souls Day of the First World War, remembering 'the widows, and orphans, the even sadder fathers and mothers' who 'will not be able to visit their best beloved in those usual graveyards' because their beloved lay elsewhere in Europe.[53] Of the essay's seven paragraphs, the opening three attempt to summon a spirit of place before turning to demand a radical commitment to an unsettling, even disruptive engagement of the reader with his or her own self. Consider a sequence from the opening of the essay:

> This is the day when, in Catholic countries, the Autumn mists are bittersweet with the smell of bruised, soaked chrysanthemums. For the folk of the living are all out in the cemeteries, or on their way thither through wet streets or along muddy roads, on their annual visit to the folk of the dead, to whose graves, for even to whose indiscriminate bone-houses where paupers are stacked to make room in the earth for more paupers, they bring flowers, or a few leaves, or a penny light or oil lamp, spending half [an] hour, sometimes pathetically eating their midday meal out of a basket or paper, in the company of those to whom this day is consecrate.[54]

[52] Kipling, 'On the frontier of civilisation', p. 16.
[53] V. Lee, 'War the grave of all good', *Labour Leader*, 12 (28 October 1915), 3. [54] Ibid.

The rising readerly expectation in this passage is of a sensuous but also whimsical embodiment of the people, their rituals, and places. We expect the essay to say anything it has to say about war by staying within the familiar voice of the essayist as she captures the distinct spirit of European cemeteries and graveyards in the first week of November. But the opening paragraphs struggle to enclose the reader in the intimate site of rituals of remembering the dead. The speaking voice of the essayist observes the people at the cemetery from an inhospitable distance, leaving the reader also to observe from the outside. And before the reader is given any chance to connect with the spirit of the place, they are flung into the anxieties of persuasion, the stringent tempo of demand, exacting ethical binds and a sense of time running out.

From here on, the essay pursues its mission of recovering what rhetorics of war exclude: it demands responsibility for cycles of violence and generates argument after argument for engaging with the adversary other than as enemy. The reader is faced with 'unclean bodies politic', the 'ghastly superstitious rite' of self-sacrifice, and the loss, common to all 'of German and Austrian, as well as of British and French and Italian and Russian' peoples, of habits 'of discussion and criticism, equanimity' and 'sympathetic imagination'.[55] The agenda, the aesthetics of demand, the rhetoric of persuasion, give way to feelings of unsettlement and a difficult, perhaps even impossible, relationship with the essayist.

Lee was perfectly capable of writing delicate, beautiful, ordinary but piercing, pleasurable and hospitable essays when she chose.[56] Her essays on war, however, are unrelentingly focused on only one form of relationality, oriented towards recovering that which war excludes: the demand to take responsibility for cycles of violence and the space to imagine non-hostile engagement with the adversary. Lee conceives of this process in terms of a physical and mental adjustment that hovers between elevation and difficulty. In her understanding, it is not by appealing to communal consciousness and union that one fosters non-violence but by appealing to people's capacity to engage different parts of the self and others obscured by our home field of vision. Her rejection of a pact of essayistic friendship was for her a rejection of a romanticised, even manipulative vision of communion, in favour of a

[55] Ibid.

[56] Vernon Lee's essays, particularly those on the 'spirit of places', enjoyed a margin of fame way into the 1930s. Virginia Woolf considered Lee, together with Charles Lamb, Francis Bacon, Max Beerbohm, Joseph Conrad, Walter Pater, and Leslie Stephen, as one of the great essayists of the English language. Woolf, 'The modern essay', p. 221.

peace process in which communities clash but never lose sight of their commitment to congregate and never fail to face the responsibilities and demands of the other. Her inhospitable pacifist essay transforms the failure of interpersonal relation into a far more general precondition for ethical life. Her decision to allow a rhetoric of persuasion to trample the hospitality of the essay required taking on board the unease that comes from giving attention to what is profoundly other to oneself. The non-violent politics this amounts to involves a commitment to relationality, irrespective of the fact that communion is fleeting.

Conclusion

We are living in another age of war, and ours is another decade of exhausted bodies. Historic memory, requiring the grace and slowness of contemplative time, is faltering under the burden of hyperactive channels of rapid communication, consumption, and destruction. Eric Hobsbawm has gone so far as to claim that historic memory is no longer alive, that links between generations have been severed, and that 'knowledge of even the basic facts of the century cannot be taken for granted'.[57] But if ethics means acting responsibly for others – past, present, and future – then to live in a permanent present is an ethical failure. Ethics is deeply entangled in memory, and memory rests on objects, languages, and textualities by which 'we encounter the past at first hand', meaning that 'we have direct sensory experience of surviving historical events', as Jules David Prown explains.[58]

Amidst the current issues ravaging our existence, we draw on acts of remembering, not to sustain illusions of progress but in an effort to eradicate injustice. This journey alone sustains strong ethical cores. We draw on the scholarship of forgotten texts to continue facing world poverty, violence, and climate unrest. The stakes of essay studies are always high and always anchored in sustaining communities that, no matter how exhausted or ravaged, are alive to historical memory – public, private, communal, individual, but always shared and thus political. Politics like political essayism involves care: care for the manner with which we approach the reparation of textual objects, care for stories that emerge from processes of interpretation, care for past, present, future, and imagined perceptions and practices of war and peace.

[57] E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 3.
[58] J.D. Prown, 'Style as evidence', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15:3 (Autumn 1980), 208.

36

Undiplomatic Relations: Modernism and the Essay

MICHAEL WOOD

'It is quite obvious', Ezra Pound wrote in 1934, 'that we do not all of us inhabit the same time.'[1] An essayistic remark – both elliptical and overstated – at the end of an essay, but the sentence also begins to suggest why certain aspects of the long tradition of the essay may have fallen from favour with the modernists. It belongs to another time. Or seems to. When T.S. Eliot published a book called *Selected Essays* two years earlier (and a later version in 1950), he did not appear to have any trouble with the title, which may be a little surprising. He had good things to say about Michel de Montaigne, but he also called him 'a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element'.[2] In 1975, Frank Kermode was more careful. The volume he edited was called *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*. Kermode would have had obvious reasons for his choice: the avoidance of repetition, and the recourse to precision. Some of the essays he selected began their life in books rather than as free-standing publications. But I suspect Kermode may also have wanted to be faithful to a modernist orthodoxy.

The puzzle or tension this chapter addresses is easily described. Modernist writers all wrote essays, and yet almost none of them appear in anthologies of such work, or in studies of the essay as a literary form. Virginia Woolf is the notable exception, who not only proves the rule, but offers us an intimate understanding of how the rule works. The word 'essay' has many meanings, and we do not all inhabit the same range of usages or interpretations. There is a relatively uninflected sense – naming pretty much any sort of verbal excursion or rehearsal – and there are many inflections. But then the inflections are where the literary and intellectual action is. Woolf, Marianne Moore, and H.D (Hilda Doolittle) have a real investment in the continuing

[1] E. Pound, 'Date line' in *Literary Essays* (Cambridge, MA: New Directions, 1968), p. 87.
[2] T.S. Eliot, 'The *Pensées* of Pascal' in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 362.

life of doubt. Eliot and Pound have no commitment of this kind, but they tend to leave a space for difficult preoccupations all the same; they too know an unending argument when they see one.

The resistance of modernist writers to the ostensibly relaxed tone of the essay comes as no surprise. Why would writers interested in precision, impersonality, and the dramatically altered state of the world want to sound merely casual, or elegant, or gossipy? They do not talk of their 'rambles, or rather speculations', as Joseph Addison does; they don't make assertions like Charles Lamb's 'I do not approve of this wholesale going to work.'[3] But the complementary question is not rhetorical. Well-known twentieth-century essayists do not, in general, resist modernism. They ignore it. But the essay itself, the set of habits of thinking it allows and fosters, offers serious resistance to modernism's favourite dogmas, and the question this chapter will address is what this interaction looks like in practice.

Dangerously Personal: Virginia Woolf

When the Swiss literary critic Jean Starobinski reflects on the 'conditions, duties, stakes' of the essay, he evokes both weighing and experimenting, and calls up a work by Galileo called *Il Saggiatore* (1623), which translates as 'The Essayist' (after the Italian *saggio*, or school-theme). He reminds us that an essay for Francis Bacon is not the same as for Montaigne, and that John Locke's is different again, to say nothing of the essays of Thomas Malthus or Henri Bergson. Starobinski also writes of the risks of the essay, offering an interesting confession: even while energetically celebrating the form, he confesses that, as a scholar and a critic, he would feel 'slightly wounded' if his work were called essayism: 'I would take it as a reproach.'[4] This remark leaves much unsaid, but we catch the sense of a genuine academic (and modernist) anxiety: we have to make sure we do not look frivolous.

Starobinski likes the idea of writing that is 'insubordinate, unpredictable, dangerously personal', but he is worried about the last quality.[5] It is true that Montaigne took himself as his true subject ('I am myself the material of my book'[6]), but that

[3] J. Addison, The *Works of Joseph Addison*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Bros, 1845), vol. 1, p. 21; C. Lamb, *The Essays of Elia* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), p. 225.
[4] J. Starobinski, 'Peut-on définir l'essai?' in *Cahiers pour un temps* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), pp. 185, 187 (my translation).
[5] Ibid., p. 194.
[6] M. Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. D.M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 2.

subject, Starobinski insists, also includes an active interest in 'the life of others'.[7] Starobinski argues this point at some length, but does not quite get out of the hole he has dug for himself. It is easy to say that the selves of great writers are also the selves of many different people – Marcel Proust thought the readers of his novel would be readers of their own lives – but sometimes narcissism is just narcissism. The 'reproach' many of us might make to the essay – to many essays, anyway – is that no one except the author thinks it is insubordinate, unpredictable, or dangerous.

This is very much Woolf's terrain. In 'The Decay of Essay-Writing' (1905), she suggests that 'the personal essay' is something 'we have either invented or very much developed . . . It is true that it is at least as old as Montaigne, but we may count him as the first of the moderns' – as distinct from the modernists.[8] As Woolf puts it: 'We write essays as though this were beyond all others our natural way of speaking . . . The great burden of modern criticism is simply the expression of such individual likes and dislikes – the amiable garrulity of the tea-table cast into the form of essays.'[9] This formulation is itself an amiable version of something she states more fiercely elsewhere in the essay: 'Perhaps if you say that an essay is essentially egoistical you will not exclude many essays and you will certainly include a portentous number.'[10]

In a later piece, 'The Modern Essay' (1925), a review of Ernest Rhys's five-volume anthology, *Modern English Essays*, Woolf rescues some of those exclusions, but also returns to her earlier charge, effectively suggesting that 'the personal essay' is a kind of tautology. She is happy to admire the work of Samuel Butler, Joseph Conrad, and – above all – Max Beerbohm, 'an essayist who . . . is without doubt the prince of his profession',[11] but feels the writers represented in Rhys's later volumes, notably Hilaire Belloc, write too much and too thinly: 'One feels that a common greyness silvers everything. They are as far removed from the extravagant beauty of Walter Pater as they are from the intemperate candour of Leslie Stephen.'[12]

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), we see a writer who is resorting to and remaking the essay form as she finds it.[13] Woolf (or Mary Beton, Mary Seton,

[7] Starobinski, 'Peut-on définir l'essai?', p. 192.
[8] V. Woolf, 'The decay of essay-writing' in A. McNeillie (ed.), *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986–8), vol. 1, pp. 24.
[9] Ibid., p. 26. [10] Ibid., p. 27.
[11] Woolf, 'The modern essay' in McNeillie (ed.), *Essays*, vol. 4, p. 220. [12] Ibid., p. 223.
[13] For more on Woolf as a literary essayist, see R. Rainof's 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 34).

Mary Carmichael, or whoever says 'I' in this text) describes a change in her 'emotional light', caused by a 'fluke of the subconscious intelligence'. 'Something seemed lacking', the writer feels, 'something seemed different'. Woolf is thinking of English lunches before the First World War and after. Everything is the same except for a 'murmur or current' behind the words. 'Yes, that was it – the change was there. Before the war ... people would have said precisely the same things but they would have sounded different, because in those days they were accompanied by a sort of humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting, which changed the value of the words themselves.'[14] The difference is not a new noise but an absence of music. Woolf thinks of Alfred Tennyson, quotes from 'Maud': 'Was that what men hummed at luncheon parties before the war? And the women?' She suggests Christina Rossetti's 'A Birthday': 'Was that what women hummed at luncheon parties before the war?' She decides that 'there was something ... ludicrous' in her idea, but later, when she goes for a walk, she is still thinking 'it is strange how a scrap of poetry works in the mind',[15] and quotes Tennyson's and Rossetti's poems to herself:

> There has fallen a splendid tear
> From the passion-flower at the gate.
> She is coming, my dove, my dear ...

And:

> My heart is like a singing bird
> Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;
> My heart is like an apple tree ...

She asks, 'in a sort of jealousy, I suppose, for our own age', whether 'we' have poets anywhere near as great as Tennyson and Rossetti. Or at least this is what she seems to be asking. The detail of her wording suggests something else, a wondering whether 'one could name two living poets now as great as Tennyson and Rossetti were then'.[16]

The question, for poetry and luncheon parties, is not what we hum after the war, but where the humming has gone, and what, if anything, has replaced it. 'The living poets express a feeling that is actually being made and torn out of us at the moment ... Hence the difficulty of modern poetry; and it is because of this difficulty that one cannot remember more than two

[14] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), all quotations in this paragraph from pp. 11–12.
[15] Ibid., p. 13 (here and above). [16] Ibid., p. 14 (here and above).

consecutive lines of any good modern poet.'[17] It would be an exaggeration to say there are no memorable passages in the best modern poetry, but we do tend to remember fragments from Pound and Eliot (often about fragments) rather than longer segments. Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' has only two lines, not exactly consecutive. Woolf asks if we should blame the war for the change, and associates it, as many other writers and thinkers already had, with the death of romance and illusion. It was hard 'to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shellfire. So ugly they looked – German, English, French – so stupid.'[18] Woolf knew the war was more symptom than cause – she was the person who had said that human nature changed 'on or about December, 1910' – and also thinks we perhaps ought to be grateful for the demise of illusion, if its legacy is truth.[19] But is it? Here, she lets her thought fade away, refuses to settle the matter, as the mode of the essay delicately allows her to do.

Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads in Them: Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore composed many reviews, comments, and essays. Her collected prose runs to 672 pages and addresses contemporaries and classic English authors alike, from Elizabeth Bishop and William Carlos Williams to William Blake and Shakespeare. Of her own tone as a critic, she says, 'I bring up, in the course of time, the subject of writing, touch in a light, apparently unconsciously affectionate manner, upon the possibilities of art.'[20] The near-oxymoron of the adverbs is both elegant and funny. And she is in no doubt about the value of poetry: 'Poetry, that is to say, the poetic, is a primal necessity'; 'The words poetic and fatuous ought not to be synonyms'; 'Poetry is a magic of pauses.'[21] Given these riches, it may seem perverse to take one of Moore's poems as a prime example of her work as an essayist. However, the paradox illustrates very clearly – with the clarity of impeccable mischief – one of Moore's major worries about poetry, and her simulation of the essay form allows her to enact as well as name the problem. Unlike Alexander Pope, though, she chooses almost to abandon verse to do this.

[17] Ibid. [18] Ibid., p. 15.
[19] V. Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 96; and on being grateful for the truth after all, Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 15.
[20] M. Moore, *The Complete Prose* (New York: Viking, 1986), p. 14.
[21] Ibid., pp. 169, 338, 589.

The work I want to look at is simply (or not so simply) called 'Poetry'. It was first published in 1919, though there are many versions, the last of which is very short and appeared in Moore's *Complete Poems* (1967), its brevity resulting in 'the devastation of many readers', a later editor says.[22] It reads in full:

> I, too, dislike it.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.[23]

Here we have the personal opining we associate with essays. The 'too' suggests the author knows she has company, and the 'it' refers to the word that constitutes the work's title. 'Perfect contempt' is rather extreme, and the logical insertions – 'however', 'after all' – sound so much like discursive prose that we scarcely know what to do with them. The notion of 'the genuine' appears to be an evasion or a riddle: at best we get a sense that we should suspect poetry of fakery, but no feeling at all for what the real thing might look like. As Adam Phillips reminds us, Moore herself said that 'omissions are not accidents'.[24] The poem leaves us, not devastated, perhaps, but certainly stranded. The word 'complete' in the book's title looks like an irony.

Sixteen years earlier, in her *Collected* (as distinct from *Complete*) *Poems*, Moore had been quite talkative. The opening lines were the same, except for a follow-up to the first assertion: 'there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle'. But then there are twenty-five lines still to come. The poet evokes 'hands that can grasp, eyes / that can dilate, hair that can rise', and says 'these things are important not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful'. We wonder how Tennyson and Rossetti would make out if faced with this test, let alone Pound or Moore herself. The speaker goes further: 'we / do not admire what / we cannot understand.'[25] We do not? Why are we reading this poem-essay?

The work now launches into an extraordinary list of 'phenomena', all of them 'important':

[22] G. Shulman, editorial note in M. Moore, *The Poems*, ed. Schulman (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 412.
[23] M. Moore, 'Poetry' in *Poems*, ed. Schulman, p. 135.
[24] A. Phillips, 'Up to a point: the psychoanalyst and the essay' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 314.
[25] Moore, 'Poetry', p. 135 (and above).

> The bat,
> holding on upside down or in quest of something to
> eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
> a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea,
> the base-ball fan . . .

The list continues with 'the statistician' and insists that we should not 'discriminate against "business documents and school-books"'.[26] Even then, it is not enough merely to attend to this catholic range of phenomena that count as important. When they are 'dragged into prominence by half-poets, the result is not poetry'.[27] The 'poets among us', Moore writes, must learn to be 'literalists of the imagination', a phrase she derives from W.B. Yeats.[28] Then perhaps we/they will be able to 'present for inspection', as the work's most famous line has it, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them'.[29]

We begin to understand Moore's game, perhaps, to understand why she needs to play with common preconceptions of prose and poetry in this way, and why the poem feels like an essay. Too many readers (and poets) have thought poetry's vocation is to keep real toads out of it – this is when 'poetic' and 'fatuous' are synonyms – and the principle has to be re-examined. The gardens, no doubt, will have to be both symbolic and real, as they always were for Andrew Marvell and his early modern peers. And we can listen to 'the way toads talk', as Moore says in the title of an early poem:

> The spot upon my back that none would see there
> Needs must be there –
> Undisguised:
> Immaculate, the heart that God has newly
> Claimed, as truly
> Lies despised.[30]

Newly, truly. A good rhyme, and with the semantic clash between claiming and despising, a strong instance of the need both to imagine the fairy tale we can't see, and to see what is unromantically there.

[26] Ibid. (and above). [27] Ibid.
[28] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (1961; New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 119.
[29] Schulman, editorial note in Moore, *Poems*, p. 135; the 'toads' are from 'Poetry'.
[30] Ibid., p. 26.

T.S. Eliot: The Buffoonery of Emotion

In spite of the well-known doctrine of impersonality, the essays of modernists were personal too, in their way, and even T.S. Eliot's manifesto has its carefully placed slips into the wrong mode. 'The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.'[31] Clear enough, although the imagery of sacrifice and extinction seems extreme, much in the manner of Moore's contempt. 'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.'[32] Also very clear, but now the man is separate rather than extinct. And as Eliot's essay reaches its finest moment – 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' – we get the amazing casual afterthought: 'But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.'[33] Of course. The insertion of the words 'want to' reads like a discreet confession. The dogma has an underside of doubt.

If we turn to the essay in which Eliot writes of Montaigne as a 'gas', we find a similar motion. He continues his negative slant, writing of Blaise Pascal as 'thoroughly infected' by the earlier writer. But then he suddenly says the 'picture of Montaigne' as an 'original and independent solitary "personality", absorbed in amused analysis of himself, is deceptive'.[34] Precisely Starobinski's point, as we have seen. 'What makes Montaigne a very great figure', Eliot continues, 'is that he succeeded, God knows how ... in giving expression to the scepticism of *every* human being.'[35] This scepticism, we might say, corresponds to Eliot's idea of the creative mind's distance from 'the man who suffers'.

If impersonality is a sort of hyperbole of austere desire, rather than a stable, literal concept, Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' begs for a careful re-reading, and his essay on *Hamlet* ('Hamlet and his Problems', from the same year, 1919) looks quite different. Shakespeare's 'failure' would not be a success but an anticipation of the modernist shortfall, waiting for Samuel Beckett to teach us how to read it. The essay opens with an attack on 'that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which ... exercises itself in criticism instead'.[36] Eliot's

[31] T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the individual talent' in *Selected Essays*, p. 7. [32] Ibid., pp. 7–8.
[33] Ibid., pp. 10–11. [34] Eliot, 'The *Pensées* of Pascal', p. 363. [35] Ibid.
[36] T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and his problems' in *Selected Essays*, p. 121.

examples are Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who substituted their own Hamlets for Shakespeare's. And Eliot mischievously adds, in what feels like a jab at the personal essay, that 'we should be thankful that Walter Pater did not fix his attention on this play'.[37]

The subject of *Hamlet*, Eliot thinks, following a critical study by J.M. Robertson, is 'the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son'.[38] This is not in itself a handicap, and Eliot mentions 'the suspicion of Othello, the infatuation of Antony, the pride of Coriolanus' as comparable dramatic materials successfully used. 'The subject might conceivably have expanded into a tragedy like these, intelligible, self-complete, in the sunlight. *Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art.'[39] At this point, Eliot becomes quite dogmatic, and we do seem to be reading a tract rather than any kind of essay: 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.'[40] This is what happens in *Macbeth*, Eliot writes, 'and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*'.[41] We can recognise the difference Eliot is pointing to, even if the pointing is awkward. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are trying to cope with an imagined world that has become actual, and they marvellously find words for their struggle. 'I have supped full with horrors', Macbeth says, and he has: material horrors, the incarnation of his worst dreams.[42] Hamlet is acting, trying *not* to find the unbearable right words for what is going on.

Eliot wants to argue that Hamlet's situation mirrors Shakespeare's. Neither of them can find their objective correlative, either in the world of the play or in the historical world of words. 'In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art.'[43] But we have only to believe that the buffoonery is intended, or artistically effective even if unintended, to see the work very differently. Eliot, like so many great critics, would have got everything right except the verdict. This is certainly what I thought for a long time: wonderful barking but up the wrong tree. But we could abandon the rather stolid binaries of subject and object, inside

[37] Ibid. [38] Ibid., p. 123. [39] Ibid., p. 124. [40] Ibid., pp. 124–5. [41] Ibid., p. 125.
[42] W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), p. 177.
[43] Eliot, 'Hamlet and his problems', pp. 125–6.

and outside, failure and success, and wonder about something similar to what Woolf identified as an absent humming. Under its dogma, Eliot's essay may be asking more subtle, personal questions. What if we do not go for 'critical aberrations' like the essays of Goethe and Coleridge, but are not sure about emphatic critical certainty either? When do we accept memorable presentations of loss of control, or failure to get our 'stuff' into the light, as viable, even great art?

The Essay and Imagism: H.D. and Pound

The poet H.D. wrote a number of remarkable essays, and we should probably include her books on Sigmund Freud and Ezra Pound among them, but here I will concentrate on her film reviews – not only because of their richness but also because of the important theoretical question: when does a review become an essay? Woolf would say when it rides the mind in pursuit of an idea, Theodor Adorno when it catches fire.[44] But another answer to our question would be to say that a review becomes an essay when it reflects on the act of criticism, implicitly or explicitly, and in this context H.D.'s work on film can be seen to enter a remarkable dialogue with Pound's reflections on fiction. Both are dealing with what we might call the unreal edges of realism, places where the essay allows H.D. to ask difficult questions about what she knows to be a masterpiece and leads Pound to register a new precision where he might just have seen a loyalty to an old mode of mimesis.

H.D.'s criticism asks what the art of cinema is, and what it is doing, and her essay reviews ask the same questions of particular films. She tells us where she is and who she is as she watches. She thinks cinema is in many ways 'a perfect medium', one in which 'light speaks', and she believes that our 'prejudice' against the cinema as 'one vast orgy of the senses' is all wrong, or at least true only of American films.[45] Her standard of excellence for acting and film is Greta Garbo in G.W. Pabst's *The Joyless Street* (1925). This was her 'first real revelation of the real art of cinema', although she also

[44] V. Woolf, *The Death of a Moth and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 177; T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form (1958)', trans. B. Hullot-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 152.

[45] H.D., 'The cinema and the classics II: Restraint' and 'The cinema and the classics I: Beauty', both in J. Donald, A. Friedberg, and L. Marcus (eds.), *Close Up 1927–1933: Cinema and Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 112 and 105, respectively.

says she saw it, 'as I see most of my pictures, more or less by accident'.[46] Her loyalty to accident is one of the reasons why she likes to tell us where she saw a particular film – Lausanne, Montreux, Berlin – and what makes her reviews essayistic.

H.D.'s review of Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*) appeared in the magazine *Close Up* in 1928. She admires the film and the director, but she feels something has gone wrong. 'This Jeanne is sprung upon us and why should it be? There is a gap somewhere. We criticise many films, sometimes for crudity, sometimes for sheer vicious playing up to man's most febrile sentiment, sometimes for cruelty or insincerity. We criticise Jeanne d'Arc for none of these things.' No, the problem is that Jeanne has been 'kicked towards the angels'.[47] The historical Jeanne too had other selves, other moments, but then this is where the film creates doubts in the critic. It has all too persuasively gotten rid of these other moments. It portrays Jeanne, H.D. writes, 'as intolerably sturdy and intolerably broken', and this is what arouses our 'defiance':

> The passion of the Jeanne is superbly, almost mediumistically portrayed by Mlle Falconetti. Heart and head are given over to inevitable surrender. Heart broke, head bowed. But another set of curious nerve-reactions were brought into play here . . . *Must* I be made to feel on the defence this way and why? Also why must my very hands feel that they are numb and raw and bleeding, clenched fists tightened, bleeding as if beating at those very impregnable mediaeval church doors?[48]

Dreyer's Jeanne is better than ours, more 'authentic', but that is part of the problem: 'Scathing realism has gone one better than mere imaginative idealism. We know we are out-witted . . . The Jeanne d'Arc of Carl Dreyer is so perfect that we feel somehow cheated.'[49] In one sense, H.D. is repeating the gesture of Eliot and Starobinski when they try to rescue Montaigne from a supposed excess of personality. 'We all have our Jeanne, each one of us in the secret great cavernous interior of the cathedral (if I may be fantastic) of the subconscious.'[50]

If we are thinking of the review as essay and the essay as criticism, another good piece to consider closely is Pound's review of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, first printed in *The Egoist* in 1914. Pound has plenty to say about criticism.

[46] H.D., 'The cinema and the classics I: Beauty', p. 106.
[47] H.D., 'Joan of Arc' [review of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*], in Donald, Friedberg, and Marcus (eds.), *Close Up*, p. 133 (and above).
[48] Ibid., p. 130. [49] Ibid., p. 131. [50] Ibid.

When he lists five 'categories' of criticism (by discussion, by translation, by exercise in the style of a given period, via music, and in new composition), the scale of value is rising from the first to the last. Indeed, he calls criticism by discussion 'mere yatter, logic-chopping, and description of tendencies', rather half-heartedly admitting that it may also offer 'the clearly defined record of procedures and an attempt to formulate more or less general principles'.[51] Aristotle, 'being neither poet nor complete imbecile', did manage some work along these lines. Pound's firmest formulation of his approach, written appropriately in another essay on Joyce, was the following: 'The best criticism of any work, to my mind the only criticism of any work of art that is of any permanent or even moderately durable value, comes from the creative writer who does the next job; and *not*, not ever from the young gentlemen who make generalities about the creator.'[52] In practice, this means that any form of writing, including critical prose, should get as close to Imagism as it can – that is, as far as can be from Moore's travesty of a rambling essay poem. What we need is 'hard light', language that is 'harder and saner', freedom from 'emotional slither', 'fewer painted adjectives'.[53] This is a modernism that wants to raid the distant past in order to save us from the legacy of more recent days: 'In the art of Daniel and Cavalcanti, I have seen that precision which I miss in the Victorians.'[54]

And this is why Joyce is such an ideal performer. 'Mr Joyce writes a clear hard prose. He deals with subjective things, but he presents them with such clarity of outline that he might be dealing with locomotives or builders' specifications'; Joyce 'does not weave convolutions . . . He gives the thing as it is.' Associating the Irish with sentimentality and fantasy, Pound pretends to be surprised at Joyce's nationality: 'One is so tired of the Irish or "Celtic" imagination . . . flopping about. Mr Joyce does not flop about. He defines.'[55] A few years later, Eliot will be using the concept of the objective correlative to explain the difference between flopping about and defining, and the linkage of thought is important, in part because it begins to show how the modernists worked as a chorus rather than a cluster of individuals, and even more because it reveals an element of fantasy in the refusal of fantasy. 'The thing as it is' is as much a dream as the Celtic twilight. The underlying

[51] Pound, 'Date line', p. 74.
[52] E. Pound, 'Ulysses' in *Literary Essays*, p. 406.
[53] E. Pound, 'The later Yeats' and 'A retrospect', both in *Literary Essays*, pp. 380 and 12, respectively.
[54] Pound, 'A retrospect', p. 11.
[55] E. Pound, 'Dubliners and Mr James Joyce' in *Literary Essays*, pp. 399–400 (and above).

argument Pound and Eliot are making is that for some it is a better dream – more timely, actually needed.

Pound goes on to explore openly a part of this argument, although not without getting himself into a tangle, caught between the international and the local. There are tangles, though, as I think our examples from Woolf, Moore, Eliot, and H.D. have shown, that may take us further than clarity could. Joyce, says Pound, 'accepts an international standard of prose writing and lives up to it'; 'He gives us things as they are, not only for Dublin, but for every city.' Pound manages to steady this thought by saying that 'good writing, good presentation can be specifically local, but it must not depend on locality'. Still, the internationalist in Pound has already gone too far, wiping out Joyce's realism even as he seeks to praise it: 'Erase the local names and a few specifically local allusions, and a few historical events of the past, and substitute a few different local names, allusions and events, and these stories could be retold of any town.'[56]

Pound gets back on track when he praises Joyce for his 'rigorous selection . . . his exclusion of all unnecessary detail'.[57] But of course the detail and the selection includes quite indispensable names, allusions, and events, not a blurry invitation to replace Dublin with any other old city. The critical point is correct, I think. A created world can in its particularity call up or be compared to other worlds, but this is not to reach for the notions of the universal or the international. It is to recognise that specificities recur. What is engaging about Pound's modernist move in this essay is his attempt to define a form of precision that is not merely clerical, or a matter of documentation, and to do so without letting in any painted adjectives. Still, he is being romantic, we might say, about things as they are.

Conclusion: Walter Benjamin on Experience

'Experience has fallen in value', wrote Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Experience and Poverty'.[58] Kathryn Murphy has written persuasively of 'the essay's perennial preoccupation with experience',[59] and we see immediately why Benjamin's evocation of experience as withered away poses such a threat to the essay form – or would do, were the essay not made to survive

[56] Ibid., p. 401 (and above). [57] Ibid.

[58] W. Benjamin, 'Experience and poverty' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, part 2, trans. R. Livingstone (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 731.

[59] K. Murphy, 'Of sticks and stones: the essay, experience, and experiment' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 80.

just such attacks and deftly prepared to speak about what it cannot do. The beginning of the fall Benjamin describes took place, as did so many lapses in modern mythology (and historiography), just before or during the First World War: 'Wasn't it noticed at the time how many people returned from the front in silence? Not richer but poorer in communicable experience?'[60] Noticed or not, Benjamin said, 'there was nothing remarkable' about the impoverishment of experience: 'For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers.'[61]

Rather hastily, Benjamin collects these developments under the umbrella of 'technology' as the chief reason why 'a completely new poverty has descended on mankind', a condition that is 'not merely poverty on the personal level, but poverty of experience in general'; 'This should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for new experience. No, they long to free themselves from experience.'[62] Technology is relevant to what was happening in the early years of the twentieth century, but it will not really do the conceptual work Benjamin is asking it to do. Still, the dimensions of experience he evokes – let us call them war, the body, money, and politics – did all feel altered, as many writers have testified, and it is notable that Benjamin is talking about an event that is translatable into a tale. If we can't coherently tell someone about it, it's not an experience: 'Where has it all gone? Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? . . . Who can still call on a proverb when he needs one?'[63]

I cannot help thinking again of Woolf's characters who no longer have the hum of musicality beneath their words. Of course, humming is not narrating, and Woolf is thinking of the rarity of illusion rather than the bankruptcy of experience. It is striking, though, that Benjamin, like Woolf, wonders if the apparent loss may be a gain, and uses the word 'illusion' in just this context. The 'hallmark' of the newly impoverished world, he says, is 'a total absence of illusion about the age and at the same time an unlimited commitment to it'; 'Here and there, the best minds have long since started to think in these terms.'[64] But it is hard to have lost that culture of 'communicable experience', that fund of stories and romance, and sad to think we have to rely on the best minds, and can meet them only here and there. Benjamin's definition of the storyteller as someone who 'has counsel' for others, speaks

[60] Benjamin, 'Experience and poverty', p. 731. [61] Ibid., p. 732. [62] Ibid., pp. 732, 734.
[63] Ibid., p. 731. [64] Ibid., p. 733.

eloquently to the idea of a more egalitarian community: 'After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is in the process of unfolding. To seek this counsel, one would first have to be able to tell the story.'[65] This is an attractive proposition, if a little murky in its logic: if we already know the story, why are we listening to the storyteller? But then Benjamin discreetly answers this implied query: 'we are receptive to counsel only to the extent that we allow our situation to speak'.[66] We do and do not know the story, and we could always benefit from hearing it again. In this respect, the spoken experience begins to sound rather like an essay.

[65] W. Benjamin, 'The storyteller' in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3: *1935–1938*, ed. H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 146.
[66] Ibid.; translation slightly modified.

37

Feeling Real: Psychoanalysis and the Essay

DAVID RUSSELL

The poet H.D., in her memoir of an analysis with Sigmund Freud in the 1930s, records how she came to notice that she could have experiences – 'memories, visions, dreams, reveries' – that were more, or less, real. Of the former, she said: 'Their texture is different, the effect they have on mind and body is different. They are healing. They are real.' But she also noted that such qualities of realness were difficult to measure: 'we cannot prove that they are real'; we can only 'discriminate as a connoisseur . . . between the false and the true'.[1] H.D.'s observations point to an inquiry central to psychoanalysis, in its interest in a distinction between lives that feel real and vital, and lives that do not – or that are somehow missing out. Both the essay and psychoanalysis aim to show us what we are missing.

Marion Milner, who would later become a central figure in British psychoanalysis, framed a similar inquiry in two books of essays published during the 1930s. She lamented that the forms and images of achievement offered to her by her culture – what she termed the 'reach-me-down mass-produced mythology of Hollywood, of the newspapers, or the propaganda of dictators' – had led her only to a striving, often competitive and envious, sort of existence, one in which she felt 'shut away from whatever might be real in living'.[2] Throughout her long career, in which essay writing led her to clinical practice, Milner sought to imagine a good life less by the lights of exigent competition, and more by the illumination of what she called, after William Blake, 'eternity's sunrise', by which she meant to evoke the unrecognised relational connections within and between people, and between people and the environment, which may be lit up, if given the right kind

[1] H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 2012), p. 35 (and above). For more on H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) in relation to the essay, see M. Wood's 'Undiplomatic relations: modernism and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 36).

[2] M. Milner, *An Experiment in Leisure* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 174, and *A Life of One's Own* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 2.

of attention.[3] In seeking more vital alternatives, and a fuller sense of reality, she brought together two different traditions: the older literary form of the essay, and the newer, and contested, genres of psychoanalysis – whose major inheritors, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, had relatively recently arrived in London.

From one point of view, the conjunction of the two traditions was an accident waiting to happen; from another, it is surprising that it happened at all. The essay's promise to psychoanalysis was contained in its generic and formal resources, but also, and perhaps more excitingly, in its suggestions about modes of relation to life. In joining the resources of these traditions, Milner's project reveals essayistic qualities of British psychoanalysis in the twentieth century, particularly among those practitioners termed the 'middle' (later the 'independent') group – a group that was particularly interested in the ordinary capacity for literary and aesthetic perception as qualities of a fuller life. Its members were largely English, Welsh, and Scottish, from Protestant and often nonconformist cultures, who earned their monikers because they refused to take sides in theoretical disputes between the two rival approaches to psychoanalysis in Britain, led by 'Miss Freud' and 'Mrs Klein', which came to a head in 'controversial discussions' during the Second World War.[4] Indeed, the middle group was 'at the beginning . . . not a group at all; the analysts who found themselves belonging to it had merely refused to belong to either of the sectarian groups that had been formed'.[5] Stimulated, but refusing to be recruited, by this urgent contest of theories about human development, the middle mode of psychoanalysis became a curiously essayistic venture.

Two Arts of Excess

Instead of subscribing to doctrine, Marion Milner and the middle group (which included D.W. Winnicott, Masud Khan, Michael and Enid Balint, and others) developed more general correspondences between the psychoanalytic ideas arriving from Vienna and Berlin and the formal resources of

[3] See M. Milner, *Eternity's Sunrise: A Way of Keeping a Diary* (London: Routledge, 2011).

[4] An important exception was Masud Khan, who arrived in Britain from Pakistan and became central to the middle group's thinking and publishing. His reputation came to be mired in controversy. See L. Hopkins, *False Self: The Life of Masud Khan* (New York: Other Press, 2008). On the 'controversial discussions', see P. King and R. Steiner (eds.), *The Freud-Klein Controversies, 1941–45* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[5] G. Kohon, *The British School of Psychoanalysis: The Independent Tradition* (London: Free Association Books, 1986), p. 49.

literary writing, in order to emphasise particular commitments in British psychoanalysis through the British essay. In the process, they developed a mode of psychoanalysis that, like the essay form, was particularly attuned to relational attitudes and styles in specific moments of contact with others, and with the world. I wish to argue that what Gregorio Kohon has termed, in a history of the middle group, 'the British preoccupation with the immediacy of the clinical situation' has its broader analogue in the British essay's preoccupation with the art of the encounter.[6] Khan, for one, claimed a preference for 'clinical encounters' over 'case history'. In describing his practice, he insisted on an important distinction between having 'a relationship' and experimenting with 'relating' between two people: 'I feel that a *relationship* implies some sort of surrender from both parties. In *relating*, each retains a separateness and distance, which allows more room for playing.'[7] It was from this playful relational focus – on encounters, on environments, and modes of attention, and on the ground that must be cleared in order to reach a wider perception – that the middle group achieved its distinctive contribution to psychoanalysis.[8] In the process, it formulated as a developmental achievement something that had long been evidenced in the tradition of the literary essay: the task of coming to face reality for oneself, of realising one's experience for oneself, and so of finding what Milner called 'a life of one's own', in her book of that title.

This emphasis in British psychoanalysis produced some of its better-known terms of art, particularly as they were put into circulation by Winnicott (who was good at coining them), including 'aliveness', 'feeling real', 'transitional phenomena' and 'the true and false self'.[9] So much of the shared perspicacity of the psychoanalytic session was understood to be directed at this task of realisation – of finding the relation to one's life by which one's life becomes one's own. To discern between 'dreaming, fantasying and living', wrote Winnicott, requires an attention to 'qualitative differences' that 'can be extremely subtle and difficult to describe'.[10] All these terms attempt to evoke what is crucial to the quality of vital relations in an ordinary language, wary of abstract system. Indeed, psychoanalysts of the

[6] Ibid., p. 27.
[7] M.R. Khan, *Hidden Selves: Between Theory and Practice in Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1983), pp. 127, 120 (italics in original).
[8] On the 'relational space' of the essay, see R. Baldacchino's 'The essay in the age of catastrophe' in this volume (Ch. 35).
[9] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 91, 158, 1; and *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 140.
[10] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 36.

middle group employed practices of description that sought to exceed systematic method. As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze explains, in citing the originality of Winnicott, even 'such an original thinker as Melanie Klein remains within the psychoanalytic system', because the patients bring in their lived, intense, experiences, and Klein translates

> them into fantasies. Thus a contract, a specific contract is established: give me your states of experience and I'll give you back fantasies. The contract implies an exchange of money, and of words. Now, a psychoanalyst like Winnicott works at the limits of psychoanalysis because he feels at a certain point this contractual procedure is no longer appropriate. There comes a time when translating fantasies, interpreting signifier and signified, is no longer to the point. There comes a moment that has to be shared: you must put yourself in the patient's situation, you must enter into it. Is this sharing a kind of sympathy, or empathy, or identification? Surely, it is more complicated than this.[11]

What Winnicott actually called for is hard to describe. He sought neither to inform his patients, nor directly to empathise with them. Instead he sought to open up spaces and times for new capacities, and new relational modes between analyst and patient, and by extension, between the patient and the world. Often Winnicott describes this capacity as playing. Deleuze turned to the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche in order to find a kind of writing that could communicate the experience of vital, more playful, reality without reducing it to linguistic code or systematic contract. But there was a more immediate tradition at hand, for Winnicott and the rest of the middle group, in essays of relation. The essay's promise to psychoanalysis comes, as we will see, in its generic and formal resources; but also in its suggestions about modes of relation to life.

For much of the history of psychoanalysis – before and after the middle group's intervention – this connection between psychoanalysis and the essay has been missed. For psychoanalytic theory has in general, as the psychoanalyst and essayist Adam Phillips has pointed out, 'discarded the essay as a useful term and a useable form'; Phillips notes that although it 'would be portentous . . . to suggest that in the psychoanalytic literature, as it is in fact called, the essay is repressed. It is, though, certainly not included.'[12] Phillips's

[11] G. Deleuze, 'Nomad thought' in D.B. Allison (ed.), *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 144.

[12] A. Phillips, 'Up to a point: the psychoanalyst and the essay' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 316.

own writings are an important exception to this neglect; he is one of the few truly literary psychoanalytic writers extending the insights of the middle group in the present day.[13] He suggests that the 'uncertainty' of psychoanalysis about its own status – 'as an art or a science, as a psychology or metaphysics, as religion or therapy, and so on' – means it has often sought the dogmatic certainties that essays characteristically, creatively, evade.[14]

The contents of today's major psychoanalytic journals will not strike the reader as particularly essayistic. And this is all the more strange because psychoanalysis's most distinctive modes of thinking, and its practical techniques of association, are just that. As Phillips points out, both psychoanalysis and the essay are 'all in the trying, and the trying it out. An essay, like a psychoanalysis, is an experiment without a proof.'[15] Psychoanalytic writings – which tend not to be essays but rather 'lectures or papers or chapters, or what are called, perhaps optimistically, contributions' – often fail to capture what it is that should be their specialist subject: just what it is that is distinctive about the psychoanalytic encounter.[16] It is as if two sensibilities, which seem made for one another, have somehow never really hit it off.

Both, in their trying out of alternatives, are arts of escape towards the more vital possibilities that may be contained in a given moment. They share an openness to qualities of experience that are in excess of method, beyond competition, and free from demands for progress. They are also largely in excess of the narrative forms (like the case study) in which individual experience is often couched. Early in his career, Freud came to realise that his patients' suffering often stemmed from the way they inhabited their own stories – their particular, if unconscious, understanding of the relations between past and future, memory and desire. Hysterics, he famously noted, suffer mainly from reminiscences: memories that delineate the horizons of their lives. As his patients became able to consciously articulate the stories they were living by, Freud proposed, they could be freed of them, and become able to seek new horizons; but this prospect led to an even more difficult question, which Freud seems to have found harder to answer. Would new narratives, equally tyrannising, come to replace the old?

Freud recognised this question in his own changing response to narrative. Over the course of his career, adjusting his ideas about traumatic events,

[13] See, for instance, A. Phillips, 'Five short talks on excess' in *On Balance* (London: Penguin, 2011). Questions of change and progress have offered the most recent focus of Phillips's work; see his *Attention Seeking* (London: Penguin, 2019); *On Wanting to Change* (London: Penguin, 2021); and *On Getting Better* (London: Penguin, 2022).

[14] Phillips, 'Up to a point', p. 314. [15] Ibid., p. 318. [16] Ibid., p. 313.

memories, and 'psychic reality', he became more uncertain about narrative as a form of psychological understanding for patients and analysts alike. Even as early as 1895, Freud worried that his *Studies in Hysteria* 'read like short stories' and so 'lack the serious stamp of science'.[17] By 1920, he had given up narrative case histories entirely. In 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (1937), he provided a brilliant if chastening account of the way stories of therapeutic 'progress' – cherished by analysts as much as analysands – present a major obstacle to therapeutic effects.

It was particular models of progress, the unconscious convictions of his patients about what it meant to improve, from which Freud found his patients were often suffering. This insight is generalisable to wider schemes of improvement. Freud realised, as Phillips has put it, that 'the desire to get better at something can all too easily usurp the question of what we do actually value and why we value it'.[18] A promise of psychoanalysis has stemmed from its invitation to us to focus less on fulfilling our ambitions and more on questioning our preferences. At its best, psychoanalysis has offered, through its interest in those who have found themselves in the ranks of life's supposed losers, a rich scepticism in response to that most seductive of social norms: success. (Josh Cohen, another essayistic inheritor of the middle group, points out that psychoanalysis asks us to accept the surprisingly promising fact that 'loss is the essential currency of the self'.[19]) There are many ways by which one can be, as Freud once put it, 'wrecked by success', but a consistent interest of psychoanalysis has been in the principle, or merely the intuition, that we narrow the horizons of our experience through precipitate knowledge of what must be won.[20] Or, as another British psychoanalyst, Wilfred Bion, would put it: 'it is necessary to be aware of "improvement" which may be denial of mystical qualities in the individual'.[21]

From the outset of his project, Freud sought a scientific alternative to the wishful distortions of psychic life. And psychoanalysis, in its attention to the seemingly inconsequential – the dream, the slip, the accident, or the free association – has often been read as proposing a science of detection, seeking

[17] S. Freud and J. Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 164.
[18] Phillips, *On Getting Better*, p. xv.
[19] J. Cohen, *Losers* (London: Peninsular Press, 2021), p. 46.
[20] S. Freud, 'Some character types met with in psychoanalytic work' (1916) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), vol. 14, p. 316.
[21] W. Bion, *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New York: J. Aronson, 1977), p. 157.

certain knowledge of the hidden mystery such clues connote (Freud inherited the project of the Enlightenment). But, just as often and just as early, it has offered the more unruly observations of an art of excess: reading in the signs not confirmation of past events, but intimations and inklings, signs of possible other selves, or other ways of living whose potential lies within us all (Freud inherited the project of Romanticism).

The essay, through its longer history, shares with psychoanalysis this latter preference for less precise attentions and more inexact qualities: of excess, a troubling of narrative, and the promise of not fitting in. It is a genre that is famously difficult to grasp, or sum up – elusive even to those literary scholars who specialise in it. Kathryn Murphy and Thomas Karshan's recent collection, *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (2020), takes as its introduction's title 'On the Difficulty of Introducing a Work of this Kind' (in an echo of the Romantic essayist Leigh Hunt).[22] In the history of criticism, literary theorists have sought to marshal some apparently more coherent genres towards the explication of grand social systems or cogent narratives of rise and fall. The essay's particular sociability has been found in its elegant refusal to be recruited.

Attempts to define the essay have often pointed to the unstable criteria of the excessive, even unassimilable, freedom of its associations. Dr Johnson in his dictionary famously defined the essay as a 'loose sally of the mind' and, less famously but just as significantly, as 'an irregular, indigested piece' and a 'first taste'.[23] The essay throughout its long history has made an art of what cannot be swiftly metabolised by our usual generic categories and interpretive methods; for this reason it does not go down too easily with builders of systems. 'In the realm of thought', wrote Theodor Adorno in the twentieth century, 'it is virtually the essay alone that has successfully raised doubts about the absolute privilege of method.'[24]

Touchstones

The unruliness of the essay is so well established a convention as to be at risk of becoming too familiar for its own good. But when placed next to another domesticated excessiveness, that of psychoanalysis, we find a deeper shared

[22] See Leigh Hunt's *Indicator*, no. 1 (13 October 1819).
[23] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols. (London: J. & P. Knapton, 1755), n.p.
[24] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. S.W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 9.

commitment, to the handling of one's own experience in the moment and a discriminating sense of how this handling may be rendered more – or less – vital. The fact that essays tend to begin with the personal, with the individual impression or taste, with the place where we happen to begin ('Where do we find ourselves?' Emerson begins his essay 'Experience') has sometimes obscured their generic interest in the very terms by which we encounter the world.[25] The relative brevity of the form, its interest in placing us in a particular situation, or set of relations – but only, as it were, for a promising moment, 'simply for that moment's sake', as Walter Pater once put it – makes it a particularly useful form for renewing our attentions to where we find ourselves to be.[26]

Both psychoanalysis and the essay take up the question of what it means to be an individual by providing creative ways of thinking about the individuality of all apprehension. Masud Khan writes of 'personalisation', achieved through 'receptive wakeful lambent consciousness'; Winnicott refers to the 'going on being' that makes 'spontaneous gesture' possible; Milner identifies what she calls the 'ground' and the 'sense of being'.[27] Many essays are explorations of the grounds of apprehension too. Often, they turn objects of acquisition into those of attention, as in the rich reflections in Charles Lamb's 'Old China', for example, or the 'Street Haunting' for which Virginia Woolf's errand of buying a pencil provides the excuse. 'To leave the straight lines of personality', if only for a moment, says Woolf, 'to escape is the greatest of pleasures'.[28]

The characteristic question of the essayist of their object of attention, as I have discussed it in my book *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2018), is 'What is this . . . to *me*?' as the essayists Matthew Arnold and Pater both proposed; or '*How it felt to be me*', as Joan Didion would later put it.[29] Essays explore the process by which people

[25] R.W. Emerson, 'Experience' in B. Atkinson (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2000), p. 307.

[26] W. Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. D.L. Hill (1893; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 190.

[27] Khan, *Hidden Selves*, pp. 183–4; D.W. Winnicott, 'The theory of the parent-infant relationship', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41 (1960), 585–95; M. Milner, *The Hands of the Living God* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 452.

[28] V. Woolf, 'Street haunting, a London adventure' in *Selected Essays*, ed. D. Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 187.

[29] On Arnold and Pater's question, see D. Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 84, 120; J. Didion, 'On keeping a notebook' in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2008), p. 134; italics in original.

come to a more discriminating sense of their own particular experience and, in the words of a James Baldwin essay, 'renew themselves at the fountain of their own lives', coming to gain 'one's sense of one's own reality' that is distinct from the known certainties of 'historical and public attitudes', and so gaining a 'touchstone for reality' – a 'touchstone [that] can only be oneself'.[30] So the essay's characteristic inquiry is not so much a matter of shoring up definite lines of one's self-picturing as it is an incitement to renewed descriptions of contact with the world.

In this process, we may come to wonder, as Milner records after her reading of an essay by Woolf on Michel de Montaigne, if 'what one calls the soul is totally different from all one expects it to be, often being the very opposite'.[31] For the psychoanalyst, as for the literary essayist, the first step is clearing the ground of what it is we thought we knew, in order to expand our repertoire of responses to what we encounter. Indeed, as I have suggested, we might describe the essay in Britain as carrying through, in the nineteenth century and beyond, the response to a challenge of Romanticism. John Keats's response to the challenge was 'negative capability', a capacity 'of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'.[32] To find out what we are we must forget, if for a moment, what we think we know. Keats, in modelling that process, became a touchstone for the prose of British psychoanalysis: for Milner in the 1930s, for Winnicott in the 1960s, and for Bion in the 1970s.[33]

The evasiveness and excessiveness of the nineteenth-century essay worked in the service of inquiry, of exploring those touchstones of experience (as Arnold also called them) by which to face reality for oneself.[34] At the end of the century, Oscar Wilde was still regretfully observing that 'we teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow'. Growth, for Wilde, required evasion of the predicament in which people 'go through their lives . . . without ever realising that they are probably thinking other people's thoughts, living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one

[30] J. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 17, 43.
[31] Milner, *A Life of One's Own*, p. 173. [32] See Russell, *Tact*, p. 23.
[33] Milner, *A Life of One's Own*, p. 176; Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes*, p. 179; W.R. Bion, 'Negative capability' in *Three Papers of W.R. Bion*, ed. C. Mawson (London: Routledge, 2018). On the formation of British psychoanalysis in the English Romantic period, see M. Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[34] See M. Arnold, 'The study of poetry' in R.H. Super (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Vol. 9: *English Literature and Irish Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), pp. 168–70.

may call other people's second-hand clothes, and never being themselves for a single moment'.[35] In 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' (1891), Wilde was continuing an individualist preoccupation of the essay in his century: the reimagining of the individual sensibility in contact with reality, and a drawing of discriminations between 'true' and 'false' individualism, the former allowing individuals 'to realise their personality' and the latter replacing the 'growth' entailed in such realisation with mere acquisition. What was real was only real in Wilde's use of the active verb 'to realise'; each individual must feel her way to this sense of the real herself.[36] To do so was simultaneously to make possible the kinds of collective social life in which people could be most alive. It was an interest rendered all the more possible, and urgent, as Michal Shapira has shown, in Britain before and after the Second World War, as people imagined the kinds of lives a social-democratic welfare state could make possible.[37]

A Shared Inquiry

On this basis of these commitments, the relation between psychoanalysis and the essay in Britain becomes more than a missed connection. Admittedly, it may still be difficult to trace explicit relations, or direct lines of influence, between the essay and psychoanalysis. Phillips notes that in the writings of British analysts 'there are few if any references to Addison or Steele or Johnson or Lamb or Hazlitt or Pater, or Chesterton, or Eliot or Woolf, to name the most obvious candidates'.[38] Indeed, we might plausibly suspect that the more rewarding connections between literature and psychoanalysis might be sought elsewhere, in the modernist novel or short story, for instance. But a more evasive connection – as I have been suggesting – is to be found less as a directly traceable theoretical influence, than in shared inquiry into the conditions of vitality in a given life.

Although the middle group made up the majority in British psychoanalysis in the mid-twentieth century, they risked irrelevance in their evasion of a theoretical identity (they were termed the 'muddled group' by detractors).[39] They worked at the boundary between the promisingly vague and the

[35] O. Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. L. Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 258.
[36] Ibid.
[37] M. Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[38] Phillips, 'Up to a point', p. 315.
[39] Kohon, *The British School of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 49, 72.

distractingly confused. At their best, like Keats, they advocated staying with a confusion rather than too quickly resolving it into knowledge, proposing, in the words of Enid Balint, that psychoanalytic practice depends on being able to 'tolerate the absence of a consistent story for a time, and use the muddle rather than try to discard it'.[40] Such toleration, Balint suggests, is necessary if the potential of a given psychoanalytic encounter is to be explored, rather than explained away. But describing how to do so was a challenge. What the middle group's interests revealed was just how difficult it was to describe the kinds of experience on which psychoanalysis bases its claims and commitments.

The 'dilemma of psycho-analytical communication', as Bion put it, stems from precisely this descriptive challenge. Psychoanalytic sessions may, through their free associations, and through the capacities of their setting, break from established narrative and pre-existing certainties; but then the problem becomes that of finding forms that do not simply reconvert new communication into old knowledge – whether ready narrative or established theory. The patient must go out from the virtuality of the clinical setting to face the demands of the world outside. And the psychoanalyst must face her colleagues, and attempt to explain what has happened, if such experiences are to be learned from. Bion, who was always good at homing in on such difficulties, goes on to explain that a

> report of a session (that is, the psycho-analytical realisation) must be a literal and incomprehensible jumble or it must be an artistic representation. The former need not detain us: the latter, assuming the requisite degree of artistic capacity in the psycho-analyst, implies a transformation during which selection and ordering of the material takes place. The interpretation given the patient is a formulation intended to display an underlying pattern. It is therefore similar to the mathematical formula . . . It is also similar to some aspects of painting, sculpture, or musical composition.[41]

His point was that every psychoanalytic report is a composition, and a choice of an inheritance. There can be no pure transmission, but there are available genres. And what is at stake for him is what he calls 'realisation' in much the same use of the word as we have seen Wilde employ: it is about having a real experience, or facing reality, rather than just coming to know something. Without the communication of this quality, both suggest, we miss the reality

[40] E. Balint, *Before I was I: Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (London: Free Association Books, 1993), p. 166.
[41] Bion, *Second Thoughts*, p. 131.

of the encounter. What is needed is a flexible, tentative, and provisional form, in which very particular insights, from very specific contexts, may be rendered transmissible without vitiating their power. It sounds like an aesthetic problem, and it is: a poem, a painting, or other artistic composition makes the incommunicable communicable without betraying it. But psychoanalysts are rarely artists. 'In practice', Bion concedes, 'the psycho-analyst does not possess the conditions, even if he had the attributes, for artistic creation – unless we suppose that a capacity for conversational expression can be sublimed into a minor ephemeral art'.[42]

Bion's own solution (he was not in the middle group) was to push the theoretical elaboration of his insights to analogies with mathematical forms, like symbol and function, abstracted so fully that the danger of a falsely realistic narrative is circumvented. But it is worth wondering about how quickly Bion's 'unless', in the quotation above, both raises and moves on from another possibility. For 'conversational expression' sublimed into an 'ephemeral art' describes just the strengths of the essay tradition as it had developed in Britain, not in response to the particular context of psychoanalytic treatment, of course, but to the similar, ordinary, and strange condition of life lived as an individual among others. What this means is that our experience of the world is that of an individual sensibility meeting reality; that we are able to communicate that particularity only to varying degrees; and that we are able to suppress it, too, into a compliant, falsely realistic universalism. Although Bion does not turn to the essay as a medium for solving his predicament, he defines precisely the kind of predicament from which essays often emerge.

To Psychoanalysis from the Essay

Masud Khan, who was probably the middle-group member most interested in the intellectual genealogy of psychoanalysis, more than once proposed that Montaigne's attempt to capture his own self-experience stands at the origin of a practice that leads, by way of Romanticism, to Freud's invention of psychoanalysis, and beyond.[43] But it was Milner, whom Khan encouraged to publish, who performs in her writing the connection between essays and

[42] Ibid., pp. 131–2.

[43] See M.R. Khan, 'Freud and the crises of psychotherapeutic responsibility' in *Hidden Selves*, and 'Montaigne, Rousseau and Freud' in M. R. Khan, *The Privacy of the Self* (1974; London: Karnac, 1996).

clinical practice. Her earliest essay writing began with a question: 'was there not a way by which each person could find out for himself what he was like, not by reading about what other people thought he ought to be, but directly, as directly as knowing the sky is blue and how an apple tastes, not needing anyone to tell him?'[44] She describes her project as a quest of self-observation: an attempt to discover 'a private reality, a reality of feeling rather than of knowing, which I could not afford to ignore'.[45] And so she began what she would call her 'long struggle to develop an inner life that was not just an escape from reality, but the only means by which I could face it'.[46]

In her diary books, she finds a form or genre of her own, by which to present this activity and its rhythms. In developing her diaries of the 1920s into two *sui generis* books of the 1930s – *A Life of One's Own* and *An Experiment in Leisure* – she offers, in the words of Hugh Haughton, both a 'meta-diary, if there can be such a thing, and a deliberately naïve record of an introspective intellectual investigation, which takes us . . . to the threshold of psychoanalysis'.[47] Formally, her task required of her the breaking of established conventions in search of new rhythms. So in her diary essays, just as she rejected abstraction, she also refused the definitive narrative organisation of confessional memoir.[48] She was wary of the narrative satisfactions provided by ascribing historical origins (traumatic or otherwise) to present predicaments.[49] We learn little of the ways her childhood may have conditioned her present life.[50] She published her diary books under a pseudonym, 'Joanna Field', because, as her biographer points out, she was worried about the repercussions of their strangeness and intensity upon her respectable professional life. A field is an arena, a space of thought, and the name provided Milner with a persona – an old technique of the essayist – and so, a wider field for experimentation in feeling and relating.

Milner's diary books are made up of critical reflections on this very task of discrimination, directed at her own reveries, and with an urgency that

[44] Milner, *A Life of One's Own*, p. 11. [45] Ibid., p. xxxiv.
[46] Milner, *An Experiment in Leisure*, p. 161.
[47] H. Haughton, Introduction to Milner, *Eternity's Sunrise*, p. xiii.
[48] On diaries in relation to the essay, see E.T. Bannet's 'Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays' in this volume (Ch. 8).
[49] Auden, in a 1934 review of *A Life of One's Own*, calls it 'as exciting as a detective story' and proposes, as Milner points out, that it 'culminates in a mystical experience' – a description from which Milner demurs: 'is it really so mystical?'; *A Life of One's Own*, pp. 174–5.
[50] Even the biography of Milner gives us little detail here, which implies Milner's success in maintaining her privacy; see E. Letley, *Marion Milner: The Life* (London: Routledge, 2014).

W.H. Auden (to Milner's ambivalent response) compared to a detective story.[51] These essayistic writings are not really like a detective story, however, because in them one thing does not lead to another, and there are no final revelations. They are impossible to summarise, or indeed to put into narrative form, although their rhythms and reflections make them riveting to read. What they offer is the sensibility, style, and practice of discrimination itself, as it is applied to the process of learning to become oneself. Milner thought her readers might be able to gain something from her writing's example, even as she stated that direct imitation of it must be useless.

Milner kept up this kind of essayism all her life. After training as a psychoanalyst, she became more interested in writing about visual images. She began a practice of free drawing that led her to what is perhaps her best-known work, *On Not Being Able to Paint* (1950). She also wrote psychoanalytic papers that called – very unusually for psychoanalysis at the time – for the valuing in clinical practice of a Blakean joy. 'All sublimity is founded on minute discrimination', said Blake: Milner lived up to this injunction.[52] This was the practice, and the function, of criticism in the essay tradition that preceded her. Milner was original in taking this practice to the heart of her clinical work. She provided an account of it in her extraordinary history of her twenty-year treatment of 'Susan', a patient who came to Milner 'saying three things: that she had lost her soul; that the world was no longer outside her; and that all that had happened since she received ECT [electroconvulsive therapy] in hospital, three weeks before coming to me'.[53]

Milner does not offer a determined narrative of this case. She gives an account of abandoning any knowing interpretation or diagnosis, or even of unearthing in much detail the possible causes of Susan's troubles in her personal history. Instead, Milner's account of improvement, such as it was possible, and of Susan coming to feel real and be 'born into the world', in Milner's words, focuses on a shared practice firmly based in Milner's diary books.[54] Every day, Susan brought Milner her drawings, upon which they developed essayistic responses. In the process, Milner demonstrated to her contemporary welfare state that there were alternatives to invasive forms of

[51] On reveries and the essay, see M. Russett's 'Forms of thought: dreams, reveries, and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 18).
[52] William Blake, quoted in *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1798) with Blake's manuscript notes, British Library (C.45.e.18–20), p. xcviii.
[53] Milner, *The Hands of the Living God*, p. xxxvii. For further discussion, see Russell, *Tact*, pp. 142–63.
[54] Milner, *Hands of the Living God*, p. 343.

treatment for the very ill and for the establishment of places 'other than mental hospitals' where certain unwell people 'could be sure of a roof over their heads'.[55] Her suggestions for what might matter in collective life stemmed from the creative consideration of a series of individual moments, and the seeking of realisations, if only for those moments' sake. In this task, in her time and place, Milner had a particular literary tradition behind her. She developed psychoanalysis from the essay and, connecting two traditions, she fulfilled the promise of both.

[55] Ibid., p. xxxviii.

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Transatlantic Essayism

PHILIP COLEMAN

From the seventeenth century to the present, British essayists have played a central role in the cultural and political construction of the 'transatlantic' as an idea that encompasses a heterogeneous array of voices and perspectives.[1] Indeed, one can trace a long history of essaying the transatlantic by British writers from the colonial era onwards.[2] Francis Bacon's 'Of Plantations' (1625), for example, while it offers advice to prospective planters in Virginia, begins by insisting that 'new plantations ... are the children of former kingdoms'.[3] Bacon's essay implies a transatlantic context between Old and New England and seeks to establish the terms by which economic and cultural exchange between kingdom and colony shall be conducted in the future. While it takes its cue from the establishment of plantations in the 'New World', it posits the movement of ideas across the Atlantic and, in the process, reinforces the role of transatlantic essayism in the determination of Anglo-American relations for future generations.

Transatlantic essayism, in the form under consideration here, presupposes an idea of the British essayist for whom the United States is a focus of particular attention and engagement, often involving immigration and, in some cases, a rejection of Old-World values and customs. This version of transatlantic essayism is at odds with the influential early nineteenth-century British critic Sydney Smith's belligerent disavowal of American cultural

[1] The earliest recorded use of the term 'transatlantic' is from a letter written by John Wilkes in 1779; *Oxford English Dictionary*, *s.v.* 'transatlantic (*adj.*) and (*n.*)'. The term gained renewed critical and theoretical urgency in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as 'new conceptual orientations' sought to 'resituate the United States – and the American continent more widely – in a global context'; S. Manning and A. Taylor, 'Introduction: What is transatlantic literary studies?' in *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, ed. Manning and Taylor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 1–2.

[2] The focus in this essay is on anglophone British writers. A more comprehensive study of 'transatlantic essayism' would of course need to consider writers from elsewhere in Europe in relation to a larger range of countries across the Americas.

[3] F. Bacon, 'Of plantations' in *Complete Essays* (New York: Dover, 2008), p. 104.

independence, in an essay published in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1820. 'In the four quarters of the globe', Smith famously asked, 'who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?'[4] Smith questions American literature's very existence, but his questioning takes place in a transatlantic context where British and American perspectives were caught up in frequently heated claims of affirmation and denial. In the same year that Smith published the essay in which he asks these questions, Washington Irving observed 'the literary animosity daily growing up between England and America'.[5] In 'The American Scholar' (1837), Ralph Waldo Emerson insisted that it was time to cut the cord that connected the New World to the Old altogether: 'We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame.'[6] Notwithstanding the often fractious cultural politics that underpinned British–American relations, especially in the American Early National period (1789–1837), the transatlantic has frequently functioned as a repository of powerful imaginative possibility, affording opportunities for bidirectional cultural conversation and play.

In an essay on the relationship between Thomas Carlyle and Emerson in the nineteenth century, Tom F. Wright has argued that the two writers 'helped strengthen what Benedict Anderson has called the "deep horizontal comradeship" of an imaginary congregation'; their work, Wright says, created 'a sense of simultaneity that aimed to bring into being and solidify a circle of listeners that was at times both national – of the British people or citizens of the American republic – and wider than the nation, aspiring to the broader "we" of Euro-American modernity'.[7] The centrifugal drift identified by Wright in the work of Carlyle and Emerson entered the twentieth century through the modalities of transatlantic essayism. Indeed, while Christy Wampole has rightly claimed that 'essayism has centric tendencies', transatlantic essayism has always been *eccentric* in the sense that its centres are invariably dispersed and displaced – as we see in the work of D.H. Lawrence – and it is born out of an author's acute sense of being elsewhere

[4] S. Smith, review of Adam Seybert's *Statistical Annals of the United States of America* (1818) in *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith* (New York: E.G. Taylor, 1844), pp. 93–6.
[5] W. Irving, 'The sketch book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.' in *History, Tales and Sketches*, ed. J.W. Tuttleton (New York: Library of America, 1983), p. 786.
[6] R.W. Emerson, 'The American scholar' in J. Porte and S. Morris (eds.), *Emerson's Prose and Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 68.
[7] T.F. Wright, 'Carlyle, Emerson, and the voiced essay' in T. Karshan and K. Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 216.

and, indeed, 'out of the way'.[8] This chapter will therefore explore different modalities of identity adopted by British essayists, beginning with a consideration of the ways that modernists such as Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and W.H. Auden essayed the transatlantic. It will then consider how later and contemporary writers such as Christopher Hitchens, Martin Amis, Pico Iyer, and Zadie Smith offered new perspectives on the meaning and function of transatlantic essayism that are still at play in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

Transatlantic Essayism and British Modernism

As the United States was preparing to become the most powerful nation in the world in the early twentieth century, a number of British writers realised that the transatlantic connection with the New World needed to be understood in new terms. The essay was a key form in the negotiation of these new perspectives. In an essay on 'American Fiction' first published in 1925, Virginia Woolf wrote about American literature as if it had only just been discovered by British readers:

> The English tourist in American literature wants above all things something different from what he has at home. For this reason the one American writer whom the English whole-heartedly admire is Walt Whitman. There, you will hear them say, is the real American undisguised. In the whole of English literature there is no figure which resembles his – among all our poetry none in the least comparable to *Leaves of Grass*. This very unlikeness becomes a merit, and leads us, as we steep ourselves in the refreshing familiarity, to become less and less able to appreciate Emerson, Lowell, Hawthorne.[9]

Woolf's description of the 'English tourist in American literature' could be applied to Lawrence, for whom Whitman was, indeed, 'the first heroic seer to seize the soul by the scruff of her neck and plant her down among the potsherds'.[10] Lawrence's vision of Whitman, as a catalyst for Woolf's essay, is precisely the kind of 'undisguised' but also deeply unfamiliar figure that

[8] See C. Wampole, 'Dalí's Montaigne: essay hybrids and surrealist practice' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 329. See entry 3b for 'eccentric' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: *s.v.* 'eccentric (*adj.*) and (*n.*)'.

[9] V. Woolf's 'American fiction' quoted by A. McNeillie in 'Virginia Woolf's America', *Dublin Review*, 5 (Winter 2001–2), https://thedublinreview.com/article/virginia-woolfs-america/ (accessed 27 July 2023).

[10] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 180.

she suggests British readers in the early decades of the twentieth century had not yet really encountered in their real and imaginary literary travels.[11]

In one of her later essays, 'America, Which I Have Never Seen' (1938), Woolf admits that the United States was a source of deep fascination to her. In this essay, she uses the form of the dialogue to tease out her sense of the complexity of what the United States meant to the English, calling on the 'not . . . altogether accurate reporter' of the 'Imagination' to suggest some answers. 'What interests you most in this cosmopolitan world of today?' the essay begins. Woolf's speaker responds:

> That is an enormous question; the world is a very large object, buzzing and humming on every inch of its surface with interesting things. But if we compress and epitomise, this essence and abstract of the world and its interesting things reduces itself undoubtedly to the United States of America. America is the most interesting thing in the world today.[12]

Woolf never did 'fly to America', as she puts it, but her musings depend on and derive creative energy from her visionary movement between Britain and the United States.[13] Unlike other British essayists of the modern period, however, she was comfortable sitting 'still on a rock on the coast of Cornwall', her identity firmly and decisively English – her essayism largely untroubled by the anxieties of being geographically elsewhere that pervade the work of her contemporaries.

It needs to be acknowledged that the perspective from the other side of the Atlantic – and among many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century expatriate American modernists – was very different. The 'international theme' in Henry James's writing, for example, represents a positive revision of earlier cultural antagonisms that reached its apotheosis in the twentieth-century writings of figures such as T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. Each of these writers presents a challenge to the idea of American literature as a uniquely national or 'homemade' product, but this is largely because of their recognition of the creative and cultural resources that were available to them on the other side of the Atlantic, in different parts of Europe, on the international stage. Eliot, Hemingway, Pound, and Stein, like James before them, all wrote

[11] For more on the relation between travel and the essay, see B. Schaff's 'A brief history of travel and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 30).
[12] V. Woolf, 'America, which I have never seen' quoted in McNeillie, 'Virginia Woolf's America'.
[13] Ibid.

transatlantically, a term whose unwieldiness reflects the slipperiness involved in defining any one of these authors solely in relation to their American or European affiliations.[14] Operating between cultures in the multi-perspectival spaces of transatlantic possibility, these and other expatriate modernists from the United States problematise rigid forms of national literary and cultural identity. The notion of the transatlantic and the idea of 'transatlantic literature' allow for a suspension of the demand that a writer be defined solely in relation to one or another national context. This realisation is central to the achievement of many early twentieth-century American writers, but it is also something that certain British writers became increasingly aware of in the course of the twentieth century. Moreover, it is fundamental to the development of British transatlantic essayism in the modernist period.

In *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), D.H. Lawrence asks: 'Where *is* this new bird called the true American? Show us the homunculus of the new era. Go on, show us him. Because all that is visible to the naked European eye, in America, is a sort of recreant European. We want to see this missing link of the next era.'[15] This is basically a reformulation of Sydney Smith's questioning of American attainment from a hundred years earlier, but it could be said that the 'missing link' sought after by Lawrence was not anything produced by the United States on its own. Lawrence envisioned a new kind of identity for the British writer who was caught, as Lawrence himself was, between 'Old World' and 'New'. Writing in the 1950s, Richard Aldington said that Lawrence began his career by 'basing himself on Hardy and Whitman', but the dialectic he proposed between British and American influences is in fact brought to an important focus in Lawrence's transatlantic writings.[16] Lawrence's essays on New Mexico, where he lived on a ranch for two years in the 1920s and where his cremated remains were eventually deposited, are among the most striking attempts by a British writer from the early twentieth century not only to essay the transatlantic – to try and negotiate what is at stake in writing from a place that is neither Britain nor America but someplace in between – but to embrace it as a source of dynamic and expansive cross-cultural understanding and creative possibility.

[14] Eliot, for example, may quite reasonably be read as both a British and an American writer, in the same way that we may say that Pound was both an American and, for a long stretch of his career, an 'Italocentric' one. On Pound and Italy, see M. Bacigalupo, *Ezra Pound, Italy, and 'The Cantos'* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2020).

[15] Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 3.

[16] R. Aldington, Introduction to D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 7.

Referring to Lawrence's description of himself as 'more than half American', Lee M. Jenkins challenges what she calls 'the still-dominant domestic definition of the English Lawrence and the integrity of nation-based traditions, British and American'.[17] She argues that Lawrence sets national canons out of kilter, on both sides of the Atlantic, and insists that 'the poems, essays, and fictions he wrote in and about New Mexico in the early to mid-1920s ... may be classified as American literature'.[18] While Lawrence did write a number of important works in and about the United States and Mexico, they are often troubled by a deep and persistent sense of bifurcation, of being caught between worlds in the way that Aldington's sense of him as the inheritor of both Thomas Hardy and Whitman suggests. Consider Lawrence's essay 'Indians and an Englishman', first published in *The Dial* in 1922, which begins with the following image: 'Supposing one fell on to the moon, and found them talking English, it would be something the same as falling out of the open world plump down here in the middle of America. "Here" means New Mexico, the Southwest, wild and woolly and artistic and sage-brush desert.'[19] Lawrence never really grew accustomed to the 'here' of New Mexico, and his essay records his attempt to make sense of what he found there, even when those he encountered were people who spoke English as he did. Although he was 'born in England and kindled with Fenimore Cooper'[20] – speaking the same language as those he met in America and possessing a strong sense of shared literary and cultural traditions – he nonetheless found himself 'a lone lorn Englishman, tumbled out of the known world of the British Empire on to this stage: for it persists in seeming like a stage to me, and not like a proper world'.[21] Lawrence was not just reflecting his sense of the strangeness of America: his essays on New Mexico also express his distance from and disaffection with contemporary England. In his New Mexico essays, Lawrence is a writer whose identity is suspended as he seeks to work out – indeed, to perform – the strange experience of essaying the transatlantic in a space that is 'not like a proper world' but something entirely new, fluid, and undefined.

Lawrence's 'American' essays thus represent a belated but important step in the history of British transatlantic essayism, a development that signals the beginning of more open forms of engagement between Old World and New in the work of twentieth-century British essayists. Throughout the

[17] L.M. Jenkins, *The American Lawrence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), p. 1.
[18] Ibid. [19] D.H. Lawrence, 'Indians and an Englishman' in *Selected Essays*, p. 189.
[20] Ibid., p. 191. [21] Ibid., p. 189.

nineteenth century and in the work of the expatriate modernists, American writers explored the problem of the transatlantic as a symbol of European inheritance and influence. In a sense, the transatlantic connection represented a greater burden for American writers than it did for their British contemporaries, because their very originality and the establishment of new cultural traditions, separate from those of the Old World, were at stake. As the United States began to bolster its status as a world power in the early decades of the twentieth century, however, British essayists, including Woolf and Lawrence, began to realise that there was something worth paying attention to on the other side of the ocean. This realisation is at the heart of Lawrence's challenge to American writers in *Studies in Classic American Literature*: 'All right, Americans, let's see you set about it. Go on then, let the precious cat out of the bag. If you're sure he's in.'[22] As he studied American literature and culture more closely, Lawrence became increasingly uneasy about his own identity as a writer, as he suggests in the opening paragraph of his essay 'Just Back from the Snake Dance – Tired Out' (1924): 'One wonders what one came for . . . The Hopi country is hideous – a clayey pale-grey desert with death-grey *mesas* sticking up like broken pieces of ancient dry grey bread. And the hell of a lumpy trail for forty miles.'[23] In 'Indians and an Englishman', Lawrence presents himself 'stand[ing] on the far edge of their firelight . . . neither denied nor accepted'.[24] Caught in the middle of the transatlantic chasm, he projected an identity he felt compelled by the pressures of modernity, with its technology of rapid transcontinental movement, to essay.

Lawrence's essays on American literature and culture in the 1920s offer a re-discovery of the New World that is at odds with the sustained interrogation of the transatlantic connection among a wide cast of writers in the United States, from the early nineteenth century onwards. It could be said that the American obsession with understanding the transatlantic connection goes back to the colonial settlements of the seventeenth century and earlier, and perhaps there was always more at stake for those who left than for those who stayed behind, as Lawrence suggests in *Studies in Classic American Literature*: 'Lucky Coleridge, who got no farther than Bristol. Some of us have gone all the way.'[25] While he admits that 'New Mexico was the greatest

[22] Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 3.
[23] D.H. Lawrence, 'Just back from the snake dance – tired out' in *Selected Essays*, p. 199.
[24] Lawrence, 'Indians and an Englishman', p. 198.
[25] Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 28.

experience from the outside world that [he] ever had', and that it 'liberated [him] from the present era of civilization', his meditations bring him to an impasse of perception and understanding: 'The sky-scraper will scatter on the winds like thistledown, and the genuine America, the America of New Mexico, will start on its course again. This is an interregnum.'[26] What Lawrence is proposing, in language both prophetic and portentous, is nothing less than an invitation to British writers to view the United States in a new way, as if they had never seen it before. Such a perspective would ultimately result in a kind of decentred transatlantic identity that manifested as a kind of existential dilemma for some writers; but it also provides a context for understanding the work of a writer like W.H. Auden, for example, whose contribution to the development of transatlantic essayism is markedly different from that of Woolf and Lawrence in key respects.

After Auden moved to the United States in 1939, he felt an immediate sense of disconnection from his English background. As his fellow traveller Christopher Isherwood recalled, on arrival in New York City, both men felt the 'tension of the nervous New World' admonishing them not to 'come snooting us with your European traditions . . . Do things our way or take the next boat back . . . Here, you'll be on your own.'[27] Auden's subsequent reinvention of himself as a writer of what Nicholas Jenkins has described as 'a new kind of hybrid "mid-Atlantic" style . . . an in-between of voices and forms' is the most significant development in transatlantic essayism after Lawrence.[28] Auden's poems give eloquent expression to his sense of cultural bifurcation from the 1940s onwards. In his essays, however, many of which began life as lectures or reviews, he explores points of connection and difference among British, European, and American histories and cultures that speak to his desire to essay new forms of existential possibility between the Old World and the New by embracing and exploring alternative expatriate identity from a British perspective.

A crucial figure for Auden in this regard was the character of Ishmael in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), whom he described as 'the explorer of possibility' in 'Ishmael – Don Quixote' (1949).[29] Contrasting Ishmael with

[26] D.H. Lawrence, 'New Mexico' in *Selected Essays*, p. 188.
[27] C. Isherwood quoted in H. Carpenter, *W.H. Auden: A Biography* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1983), p. 253.
[28] N. Jenkins, 'Auden in America' in S. Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 43.
[29] W.H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood; or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 81–127.

Cervantes's Don Quixote ('the religious hero'), Auden concludes by quoting Herman Melville's poem, 'A Requiem for Soldiers Lost in Ocean Transports', in which the latter memorialises those who were lost 'where mid-sea surges pour'.[30] Auden alludes to the naval casualties of the Second World War, but the strategic intertextuality of his work has a profound historical dimension that is central to his transatlantic essayism. Reading Melville's poem as an elegy for 'brethren in France, England and America',[31] he seeks to transcend national boundaries in a gesture that advances the transnational momentum established in the work of Lawrence and that, at the same time, presents a challenge to those very forms of nationalism that contributed to the global conflict that ended only a few years before he gave those ideas expression. For Auden, transatlantic essayism offered much more than a framework for cross-cultural understanding or comparison; it also aimed at ideological engagement and critique.

Reviewing Auden's most significant collection of essays containing pieces on American topics, *The Dyer's Hand* (1962), John Berryman observed that Auden 'moves easily back and forth across the Atlantic'.[32] Yet, it is not just that Auden could move between British and American topics with ease, as he does in the sections on Shakespeare and 'Americana' in *The Dyer's Hand*, or in the reviews and essays collected in *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973). In these pieces, his own style exemplifies his idea that 'Criticism should be casual conversation', without (as Isherwood recalled) its 'snooting' European styles and traditions.[33] From the time of Montaigne, of course, and the early British belletristic essayists, the essay had always made strategic use of a conversational style. Auden's transatlantic essayism affirmed stylistic and formal complexities that were already long established, but, as Berryman wrote of Auden's essays: 'The modesty, the casualness, the fake-American, the Henry James, the theology, the depth-psychology, are all charmingly characteristic.'[34] Auden was responding to Isherwood's advice and warning, but in his essays we can see an attempt to forge a new kind of voice for the British essayist at mid-century, one that is attuned to the accents and atmosphere he encountered, and tried to replicate, in America.

[30] Ibid., p. 127. [31] Ibid.
[32] See J. Berryman's uncollected essay, 'Auden's prose', *New York Review of Books* (1 February 1963), www.nybooks.com/articles/1963/02/01/audens-prose/ (accessed 27 July 2023).
[33] W.H. Auden, 'November 16, 1946' in A. Ansen (ed.), *The Table Talk of W.H. Auden* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 2.
[34] Berryman, 'Auden's prose'.

Contemporary Transatlantic Essayism

For British essayists who followed Auden – and especially those who sought to work between Britain and the United States in the second half of the twentieth century – the experience of cultural displacement came naturally in ways that might have been hard to countenance for earlier writers. For Christopher Hitchens, indeed, success as an essayist – like his movement between different ideological and political positions over the course of his career – had less to do with his status as an English writer than with his 'constant argument about the idea of America'. Hitchens believed that 'an essential element of the American idea is its variety', and this informs his contribution to British transatlantic essayism in a crucial way. The opening section of Hitchens's late collection *Arguably* (2011), 'All American', confirms the importance of American subjects to his work as an essayist over many decades: the United States of America is an abiding backdrop, reflecting Hitchens's affectionate if at times deeply critical sense of his 'adopted country'.[35] While his essays demonstrate clear immersion in American culture and politics, he recognises the influence of what he calls 'the Anglo-American style' in his introduction to *The Best American Essays* (2010), where he writes:

> Though the essay form probably originates with Michel de Montaigne, I would still want to suggest that there is something about it that conforms very well with the Anglo-American style. After all, the United States itself – and even its very name, according to some sources – is partly the outcome of the essayistic brilliance of the radical English artisan Thomas Paine. Somewhat like the word 'intellectual,' the word 'essayist,' and its cousin 'pamphleteer,' has a natural kinship with the idea of dissent . . . . May this kinship bring forth numerous and vigorous descendants.[36]

This is an important statement about the origins of the essay that emphasises the place of American culture in its development from the eighteenth century to the present, while also invoking the tradition of pamphleteering. It is also an affirmation of the essay's political agency and its potential to engage in meaningful, lasting ways in the public sphere, regardless of one's ideological affiliations. Hitchens, quite controversially, played on both sides of the political divide. However, he also recognised the importance of

[35] See C. Hitchens, Introduction to *Arguably* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011), p. xviii (and above).

[36] C. Hitchens, Introduction to *The Best American Essays*, ed. Hitchens (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), pp. xvii–xviii.

transatlantic essayism, not just to the development of his own work but to generations of British essayists, from Thomas Paine (who was born in England in 1737) to later writers like Martin Amis and Zadie Smith.

Like Hitchens, Amis's essays demonstrate a deep familiarity with American topics and subjects. Indeed, Hitchens and Amis share a number of common interests, most notably in their essayistic engagements with writers such as Vladimir Nabokov, Saul Bellow, John Updike, Philip Roth, and Gore Vidal. Reading Hitchens and Amis on these and other literary figures, one has the sense of listening to two friends debating the qualities of the writers they admire. Equally, their essays on politics – from Hitchens's portraits of 'The Private Jefferson' (2005) or 'Abraham Lincoln: Misery's Child' (2009), to Amis's 'President Trump Orates in Ohio' (2017) – provide important perspectives on broader developments in the United States from the nation's formation to the present. Throughout all of these essays there is a strain of Lawrentian nonconformity that Amis has identified as 'the rebel's way' and that is relevant to both his and Hitchens's self-conscious and strategic deployment of transatlantic essayism.[37] For both writers, it has entailed a significant critical element directed at literature and politics with increasing degrees of essayistic interconnection, engagement, and insight into cultural contexts on both sides of the ocean.

However, the white, male, Establishment perspectives of Hitchens and Amis must be acknowledged, and the story of late twentieth-century British transatlantic essayism's development in which they figure so prominently is complicated by a number of essayists who have emerged since the turn of the twenty-first century. Among these, Pico Iyer and Zadie Smith are particularly important given their Indian and Caribbean family backgrounds, respectively, and the fact that for them 'transatlantic' refers not just to Anglo-American connections but also to broader hemispheric and global world views and concerns. This different understanding of the transatlantic is related, in a profound way, to Iyer's and Smith's postcolonial inheritance and the fact that, for them, Britishness does not hold the same meaning as it might have for Hitchens and Amis, no matter how critical of empire those earlier figures have been. Although he is celebrated as a travel writer, for example, Iyer returns again and again to the experience of travelling, not just between Britain and the Americas, or between Britain and Europe (like Lawrence and Auden), but within a twenty-first-century context of broader

[37] See M. Amis, *The Rub of Time: Bellow, Nabokov, Hitchens, Travolta, Trump and Other Pieces, 1994–2016* (New York: Vintage, 2017), p. 318.

global displacements and configurations. As he puts it in 'The Alien Home' (2000): '[I have been] a wanderer from birth, like more and more like me, I choose to live a long way from the place where I was born.'[38] Transatlantic essayism always requires writers to engage with problems of acceptance and rejection, familiarity and alienation. For Iyer, his journeys across the Atlantic Ocean – among Britain and the United States, Mexico, Cuba, and other places in the Western Hemisphere – are just one part of a much larger experience of being in the world.

Iyer directly explores this theme in 'Grandmothers', for example, from his collection *Sun After Dark: Flights into the Foreign* (2004), which is partly about his experience of living in Japan. He wonders 'if a large part of the human enterprise isn't just the task of fitting ourselves into the larger order, adjusting to a scheme that will roll on and on long after we have been replaced by someone else'. He continues: 'For those of us who choose . . . to be permanent foreigners, you could say – it means only reconciling ourselves to, and around, the larger cycle.'[39] This 'larger cycle' of travel is related to Iyer's work as an essayist whose job necessitates an exploration of 'foreign' places. It also allows for the idea of the 'transatlantic' to be expanded in important ways in his essays, as he suggests in 'The Multiculture' (2000), where he recalls his first trip to Canada, 'coming from San Francisco' and feeling 'as if I were flying east in the classic sense, into somewhere ancestral . . . from one suburb of the Chinese "world-city" to the next'.[40] In Iyer's work, in other words, British transatlantic essayism tends towards a new form of global essayism, reaching across the Atlantic to the Americas, and from there towards the Pacific and beyond.

Zadie Smith has also engaged in this form of what we might call global or multicultural essayism, and no discussion of British transatlantic essayism would be complete without acknowledging the role it has played in her work. Like Iyer, her interest in exploring diasporic identity and the experience of emigration is evident from the beginning of her career, especially in the novels *White Teeth* (2000) and *On Beauty* (2005), but her essays also build on the work of earlier essayists in understanding and expanding the connections between Britain and the United States. Like others discussed here and throughout this volume, her essays often began life in magazines and

[38] P. Iyer, 'The alien home' in *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 209.
[39] Iyer, 'Grandmothers' in *Sun After Dark: Flights into the Foreign* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 150–1.
[40] P. Iyer, 'The multiculture' in *The Global Soul*, p. 117.

newspapers – *The Guardian*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, for example – and of course this context of periodical, newspaper, and journal publication has always been essential to the very idea and, indeed, the experience of transatlantic essayism for readers on both sides of the Atlantic. Smith's essays appear in a transatlantic literary marketplace driven by the circulation of magazines in print and online, but her range of interests also engages in meaningful and often provocative ways with what she has called 'the Anglo-American liberal middle class'.[41] In a reading of Joseph O'Neill's novel *Netherland* (2008), she says: 'These are tough times for Anglo-American liberals. All we've got left to believe in is ourselves.'[42] While she suggests that 'only one's own subjectivity is really authentic', however, Smith's essays are written from a position of expansive empathy and cultural understanding. In times that are, indeed, 'tough' for most people, Smith's essays on literary, cultural, and political subjects are celebratory and affirming while also being unafraid to engage in critique.

Smith has made particularly powerful interventions in transatlantic essayism in her consideration of race. This allows her to be read not just as a transatlantic writer but, more importantly, as an essayist of the 'Black Atlantic'. Whether she is writing about popular artists such as Michael Jackson, Prince, or Beyoncé, or the desperate conditions of those working for multinational corporations in Haiti or Liberia, Smith identifies as a citizen of 'the missing middle': the 'international community' for whom the question of identity is inextricably bound up with economic status and power. In this context, following Franz Kafka, she asks: 'What does it mean, to have a people? On no subject are we more sentimental and less able to articulate what we mean. In what, for example, does the continuity of "Blackness" exist? Or "Irishness"? Or "Arabness"? Blood, culture, history, genes?'[43] Smith's essays on Black American culture are informed by an awareness of the ways in which questions of race and identity transcend national contexts; they are influenced by her own experience of being a Black British author, but also an essayist whose interests and engagements are not circumscribed by British or American understandings of the transatlantic world. Rather, her work speaks to a world in which earlier conceptualisations of identity and belonging – from the national to the transnational – are placed under new kinds of cultural and political pressure. As she puts it in the foreword to her

[41] See Z. Smith, 'Two directions for the novel' in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 72.
[42] Ibid., p. 78. [43] Ibid., p. 69.

collection *Feel Free* (2018), she writes from the position of a self 'whose boundaries are uncertain, whose language is never pure, whose world is in no way "self-evident"'.[44]

Smith has said that her essays are written 'to be used, changed, dismantled, destroyed or ignored as necessary!'[45] Her work belongs to a long tradition of Anglo-American essayism, from Paine to Hitchens, for whom transatlantic essayism was always an ideologically charged act. It has been suggested that the essay is 'an intermediate form between poetry and philosophy' and that 'it emphasizes process over verdict or destination'.[46] British transatlantic essayism may be read in terms of this definition, but the essayists discussed in this chapter – Woolf, Lawrence, Auden, Hitchens, Amis, Iyer, and Smith – also speak to the literary and political challenges involved when an author chooses to write from a cultural position that may itself be characterised as 'intermediate', as is the case when one considers the way that the experience of being 'Anglo-American' positions the self 'in between' one nation and another, to varying degrees. This experience has led to the creation of essays that have a powerful purchase on our critical attention because of the ways that they invite us to view things from more than one perspective, often at the same time. Embracing their often fractured identities, these essayists have made major contributions to the broader development of the British essay, not least in terms of its role in helping us to understand the history, politics, and culture of the United States in its national, hemispheric, and global contexts.

[44] Z. Smith, *Feel Free: Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018), p. xii. [45] Ibid.
[46] See T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays*, p. 25.

PART V

*

THE ESSAY AND THE ESSAYISTIC TODAY

39

The Eye and the I: Essay and Image

KEVIN BRAZIL

True to its shapeshifting nature, the essay in Britain has taken many forms in the history of its engagement with visual art. Theoretical manifesto, treatise on aesthetics, scholarly analysis, covert autobiography: these have been just some of its incarnations. Ever since the institutionalisation of art history as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, the essay has had a particularly – if productively – ill-defined role in relationship to the wider field of art writing. The research article stakes its claim for authority by repudiating the subjective perspective that defined the rich tradition of British art writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, art historians as well as the gallerists and curators working in the globalised business of contemporary art have repeatedly returned to the essay to explore modes of writing and thinking about images beyond the professional and commercial limits of their trades.

This uncertainty about the essay's authority when it comes to writing about art has been an impetus driving its vitality as a form. The efforts of novelists, poets, and memoirists have overlapped with those of art critics to use the essay to explore the value and texture of subjective responses to works of art, the relationship between fact and fiction, interactions between text and image, and the power of the image in an ever more visual contemporary culture. The history of academic art writing, in Britain and elsewhere, has been the subject of extensive scholarly research in recent decades.[1] However, the parallel history of essayistic writing about art, and its relationship to wider currents in British literature, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has been less thoroughly explored. This chapter will offer a sketch of that history, from the writings of nineteenth-century essayists up to the online commentaries of the present.

[1] D. Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); J. Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000).

The Victorian Essay's Aesthetic Subjects

The earliest instances of art writing in English were treatises like Richard Haydocke's translation of Giovanni Paolo Lommazo's tract on the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture (*A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Painting, Carving, and Building*, 1598), aiming at practical instruction in drawing and design. It was only at the turn of the eighteenth century that the essay, enabled by a new kind of periodical press, established itself as a genre for writing about art.[2] Joseph Addison's *Spectator* essays on taste and the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' (1712) took as their focus 'the pleasures of the imagination or fancy . . . such as arise from visible objects'.[3] In works like Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1725), the other kind of essay – the extended treatise – articulated a new philosophical aesthetics: what Richardson called 'the science of a connoisseur'.[4] In both modes, however, the aim was less to offer an individual's reflections on particular works than to theorise the nature of beauty or taste. What Joshua Reynolds declared in his *Discourses on Art* (1769–90), the summa of official eighteenth-century British philosophy, held true for the essay as well: 'perfect form is produced by leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas'.[5] Given that from Michel de Montaigne to Theodor Adorno the essay has been defined as the form that resists the systematic and general in favour of the accidental and particular, it is not surprising that many subsequent writers on art used these qualities to rebel against the long shadow cast by Reynolds's academicism.

It is with William Hazlitt – the 'first great art critic in English', according to Tom Paulin – that the essay comes into its own as a form for conveying an individual's response to works of art.[6] In Hazlitt's essays, a new kind of spectator emerges. Hazlitt contrasts the experience of aristocrats, for whom art is a possession viewed in the home, with his 'initiation in the mysteries of

[2] R. DeMaria, Jr., 'The eighteenth-century periodical essay' in J. Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 525–48.

[3] J. Addison, *Spectator*, no. 411 (21 June 1712) in D.F. Bond (ed.), *Critical Essays from the Spectator by Joseph Addison: With Four Essays by Richard Steele* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 175–6.

[4] See J. Richardson, 'An argument in behalf of the science of a connoisseur', the second part of *Two Discourses: An Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting* (London: A. Bettesworth, 1725).

[5] J. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R.B. Wark, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 57.

[6] T. Paulin, Introduction to W. Hazlitt, *The Fight and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. x.

art' having taken place in commercial galleries or museums like the Louvre.[7] Anticipating the subjectivity of Charles Baudelaire's essays on the Parisian salons, Hazlitt is just one of 'that "number numberless" of mere gentlemen and amateurs'[8] encountering art in public and commercial institutions. And for that reason, like Baudelaire, a disaffected one. His charge that 'the English are a shopkeeping nation' occurs in an 1814 essay, 'On the Catalogue Raisonné of the British Institution', discussing the visual arts in Britain.[9] The philistinism of the public is one reason for his claim that 'the principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government, which concerns the common feelings and common interests of society, is by no means applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided on by the most refined understandings'.[10] As John Barrell has argued, mass consumption leads Hazlitt to depict 'an art whose aims and satisfactions are exclusively private'.[11] In modernity's presentation of art as commodity and heritage, new criteria for judging art, and new forms of writing about that art, became necessary.

For Hazlitt, these criteria were individuality, character, and what he called 'gusto'. He did not believe 'with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details'.[12] This attention to the relationship between the general and the individual manifests in a variety of ways. In 'On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin' (1821), a detailed ekphrasis is required in order to speculate on the aesthetic qualities the painting demonstrates. In his essays on William Hogarth, he performs what we might call an ekphrasis of character, elaborating first a personality and then a type:

> The Beau sits smiling at the looking-glass, with a reflected simper of self-admiration, and a languishing inclination of the head, while the rest of his body is perked up on his high heels with a certain air of tip-toe elevation. He is the Narcissus of the reign of George II, whose powdered peruke, ruffles, gold lace, and patches, divide his self-love unequally with his own person.[13]

[7] W. Hazlitt, 'The same subject continued' in *The Fight*, p. 26.
[8] Ibid., p. 28.
[9] W. Hazlitt, *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, Vol. 2: *The Round Table, Lectures on English Poets*, ed. D. Wu (London: Routledge, 2020), ebook.
[10] W. Hazlitt, 'Whether the fine arts are promoted by academies' in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent 1930–4), vol. 18, p. 42.
[11] J. Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: The Body of the Public* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 309.
[12] W. Hazlitt, 'On the pleasure of painting' in *The Fight*, p. 19.
[13] W. Hazlitt, 'On Hogarth's *Marriage à-la-mode*' in *The Fight*, pp. 163–4.

Here is the type who loves what he sees, not what he is: a new consumer of visual spectacle. Gusto, in contrast, is a response located in the spectator: it gives the 'truth of character from the truth of feeling',[14] and occurs 'where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another'.[15] 'Titian's landscapes', for example, 'have a prodigious gusto ... The winds seemed to sing through the rustling branches of the trees, and already you might hear the twanging of bows resound through the tangled mazes of the wood.'[16] Gusto is the capacity for art to occasion an affectively intense experience that cannot be captured by conceptual abstraction, but can be conveyed in the first-person essay. Idiosyncratic as Hazlitt's 'gusto' may be, it was his version of an emphasis that would recur throughout the aestheticist tradition of British art writing.

A comparable view of art as mediating between the particular and the general runs throughout the work of the figure who dominated Victorian art writing: John Ruskin. As George Landow has written, although Ruskin 'proposed a romantic, emotionalist theory of painting and poetry, many of his most characteristic ideas and attitudes were reactions against what he recognised as the limitations of a subjectivist aesthetic'.[17] This conflict manifests in his use of the essay as a form. *Modern Painters* (1843–60) was 'intended to be a short pamphlet', but it soon expanded into 'something very like a treatise on art', so that, as Ruskin said in the preface to the first edition, 'I scarcely know whether I should announce it as an Essay on landscape painting ... [or] apologise for its lengthy discussion of general principles.'[18] Over the subsequent four volumes the pull towards general principles clearly won out. In his later career, especially once elected Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University, the lecture became his genre of choice in writing about art. That Ruskin took up and later resigned from one of the first named university chairs in Britain shows the tensions produced by the increasing professionalisation of the study of art in the nineteenth century. He was frustrated by the demand to produce scholarly research, rather than to offer practical instruction in drawing, and through that, in Ruskin's mind, development in moral character. For Ruskin, art writing was part of a project of social critique, not just a medium for communicating scholarly research; when social change became his priority, his writing on art fell into abeyance.

[14] W. Hazlitt, 'On gusto' in *The Fight*, p. 77. [15] Ibid., p. 78. [16] Ibid., p. 77.
[17] G. Landow, *Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 92.
[18] J. Ruskin, *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), vol. 3, p. 3.

Across Ruskin's sprawling corpus of writing on art, the essay occupies an uncertain role: he begins with the intent to write an essay, but often abandons the genre for being too limited to achieve his larger aim. This aim, according to Elizabeth Helsinger, was to show that 'perception is a matter not just of individual but of cultural health'.[19] For Ruskin, the 'I' is the 'eye': subjectivity is inextricable from visuality. His 'Pathetic Fallacy', for instance, is about what the subject sees: it 'is a sign of the incapacity of his human sight or thought to bear what has been revealed to it'.[20] For all that his writings on art aim at systems and principles, they are peppered with essayistic passages recounting individual acts of seeing.

The opening to 'The Lamp of Memory' in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) demonstrates Ruskin's ability to ground what appears to the eye in the life of a writerly 'I':

> on the opposite side of the valley, walled all along as it was by grey cliffs of limestone, there was a hawk sailing slowly off their brow, touching them nearly with his wings, and with the shadows of the pines flickering upon his plumage from above . . . the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavoured, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent.[21]

As this allusion to imperial conquest suggests, neither this 'eye' nor Ruskin's 'I' exists in a timeless world of universal principles. One of the best-known examples of Ruskin's ability to conjure visual imagery in prose in *Modern Painters* is his description of J.M.W. Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1840):

> Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea.[22]

Ruskin's elision of the fact that the painting depicts drowning enslaved Africans, along with his elaborate prose culminating in an allusion to Shakespeare's bloody *Macbeth*, shows the limits of his goal to teach 'one

[19] E. Helsinger, *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 206.
[20] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 5, p. 218. [21] Ibid., vol. 8, p. 223. [22] Ibid., vol. 3, p. 572.

and the same thing to all; namely, Sight'.[23] As the medium of subjectivity, sight cannot be the same thing to all, and what one sees – or does not – is unavoidably shaped by whomever is seeing.

In his 1888 essay 'Style', Walter Pater observed that 'English, for a quarter of a century past, has been assimilating the phraseology of pictorial art . . . and none but pedants will regret a great consequent increase of its resources'.[24] This is a testament to the impact that art writing, and Pater's own essay writing in particular, had on Victorian prose style in general. One aim of Pater's essayism is set out in his critique of Matthew Arnold in the 'Preface' to *The Renaissance* (1873): '"To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.'[25] The 'Preface' also contains a subtle critique of Ruskin's approach to art writing: 'He who experiences these impressions strongly . . . has no need to trouble himself with the abstract question what beauty is in itself, or what is its exact relation to truth or experience – metaphysical questions, as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere.'[26] 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end' of Pater's encounters with art.[27] These experiences are 'moment[s]' that happen but by 'accident',[28] and they are resistant to theorisation: 'What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy.'[29] Against the lure of theory and treatise, visual aesthetics and literary poetics fuse in the essayistic emphasis on the subjective, the accidental, and the constant revision of thought.

For Pater, the essay offered a '*poesie intime*, that intensely modern sort of poetry in which the writer has for his aim the portraiture of his own most intimate moods, and to take the reader into his confidence'.[30] His ekphrasis of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1485) captures a particularly intimate affective state, 'the sadness with which he has conceived the goddess of pleasure, as the depository of a great power over the lives of men'.[31] David Russell has written that in the attempt to offer the 'portraiture of one's sense', Pater 'proposes the formal resources of the essay collection – as distinct from, say, the novel, or the poem – as spiritual exercise for his

[23] Ibid., vol. 16, p. 179.
[24] W. Pater, *Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. J. Uglow (London: J.M. Dent, 1973), p. 66.
[25] W. Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. D.L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. xix.
[26] Ibid., p. xx. [27] Ibid., p. 188. [28] Ibid., p. 140. [29] Ibid., p. 189.
[30] Ibid., p. 137. [31] Ibid., p. 47.

times'.[32] It is 'as if Pater, as his essays unfold, stages the finding and refinding of a sensibility, and ever deferring a last word'.[33] For Pater the self is simply 'a tremulous wisp', and 'it is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves'.[34] Our impressions of art are in this respect beyond the grasp of systematic analysis. Like the self that encounters them, they can only be recorded in the form of the provisional record of the essay.

Oxford dons were not the only essayists increasing the resources of English with the phraseology of the visual art. Nor, as Hilary Fraser writes, were Ruskin and Pater the only figures who 'formulated and disseminated an entirely new concept of the moral value of looking at art in the nineteenth century'.[35] Women writers like Alice Meynell, Anna Jameson, Emilia Francis Dilke, Elizabeth Eastlake, Vernon Lee, and 'Michael Field' – the duo Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper – published widely on art across a range of prose genres. For Fraser, 'the liminal status of women at the edges of the profession arguably gave them the creative freedom to imagine other ways of writing about art and its histories than were available to those who were contained by its boundaries'.[36] Some, like Lady Eastlake, drew on the models of academic art history as it was being increasingly institutionalised in Germany and Italy; some, like Anna Jameson, wrote gallery guides for an expanding tourist public. Others took up the essay as such and the emphasis it placed on the role of subjectivity in writing about art.

Vernon Lee, the *nom de plume* of Violet Page, followed Pater in writing about the affective and embodied dimensions of aesthetic experience. As she concluded a collection of essays on the Renaissance: 'My *dramatis personæ* have been modes of feeling and forms of art.'[37] The other actors in Lee's drama are the 'friends' who generate the essays from 'long discussions, rambling but eager (their seriousness shivered ever and anon by a sudden grotesque image or cutting answer, or inane pun, or diverted off, no one knew how, into anecdotes or folk tales)'.[38] Her work performs a context of

[32] D. Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 121–2.
[33] Ibid., p. 132. [34] Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 188.
[35] H. Fraser, *Women Writing Art History in the Nineteenth Century: Looking Like a Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.
[36] Ibid., p. 33.
[37] V. Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), vol. 2, p. 223.
[38] V. Lee, *Belcaro: Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p. 7.

intimate sociability, one that became explicitly queer when she co-wrote a book with her lover Clementina Anstruther-Thomson. Yet her later writings show a crisis of confidence in the value of the art essay. In 'Psychology of an Art Writer' (1903), she questions the limits of an emphasis on subjectivity. If she 'first set myself the task of investigating what I'll call my aesthetic record mostly in order to better question others, and even to serve as an example to them', she began to see in such writings 'a collection of facts that bridges the gap between the subjective study of aesthetics and psychology in general'.[39] Faced with claims to authority of newly institutionalised disciplines like psychology and art history, what can essays authored by a literary writer offer – to the author herself as much as to an audience? These would be some of the questions that writers in the twentieth century would productively explore.

Modernism's Manifestos

If Lee struggled with the widening gap between the kind of reflections on art that could be captured in the essay and the specialised knowledge produced by academic research, Virginia Woolf, in her essays on art, was comfortable adopting the position of the curious amateur. She wrote as someone 'who is not a painter or a critic of painting', but because of her intimate relationships with those who were: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Roger Fry.[40] The cross-pollination of ideas between writers and artists that characterised Bloomsbury was typical of modernism. As Laura Marcus has written, modernist writers 'turned with exceptional frequency and fullness to the visual arts, in their endeavours to define and work through questions of aesthetics and ideology, including issues concerning representation and mimesis, the nature of "the image," realism and anti-realism, temporality and consciousness, organic form, and artistic and cultural evolution. To this extent, literary modernism *is* a visual culture.'[41] Or, as Woolf herself wrote in her 1925 essay 'Pictures': 'we are under the dominion of painting'.[42] The art essay was a form in which British modernist writers, like their counterparts globally,

[39] V. Lee, *The Psychology of an Art Writer* (New York: D. Zwirner Gallery, 2018), p. 23.
[40] V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 6: *1933–1941*, ed. S.N. Clarke (London: Vintage, 2017), ebook.
[41] L. Marcus, 'Modernism and visual culture' in J.M. Rabaté (ed.), *A Handbook of Modernist Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 239–40.
[42] V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. A. McNeillie (vols. 1–4) and S.N. Clarke (vols. 5–6), 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1986–2011), vol. 4, p. 243.

explored questions that would animate their other writings. In doing so, they imputed a new sense of urgency to the art essay and claimed a different, if more covert, authority: that of their own literary practice.

Woolf's essays on art are a case in point. While only a fraction of her vast corpus is devoted to the visual arts, in those essays she articulates some of the central preoccupations of her fiction. For Woolf, 'writers are, of all critics of painting, the worst – the most prejudiced, the most distorted in their judgments . . . They are not there to understand the problems of the painter's art. They are after something that may be helpful to themselves.'[43] What helps them above all are those 'silent painters, Cézanne and Mr Sickert': 'As we gaze, words begin to raise their feeble limbs in the pale border-land of no man's language, to sink down again in despair.'[44] Woolf's essays on art circle around a paradox: writing about art reveals the differences between art and literature, yet writing about this difference serves the artist and writer alike by clarifying the distinctive capacities of her medium. In Vanessa Bell's paintings, 'No stories are told; no insinuations are made' and yet '[t]hat is why they intrigue and draw us on'.[45] In her longest essay on art, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation* (1934), Woolf performs this paradox. One speaker claims that 'Words are an impure medium; better far to have been born into the silent kingdom of painting', while another goes on to write an ekphrasis of Sickert's *Yvonne* (1917). Writing about painting, in any form, is necessary yet impossible: 'for though they must part in the end, painting and writing have much to tell each other; they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see.'[46] Like Joseph Conrad, who is being cited, this is what Woolf would attempt, from her early short fiction like 'The Mark on the Wall' (1917) to her novel most explicitly about the visual arts, *To The Lighthouse* (1927).

Like Woolf, Samuel Beckett was only an occasional writer on art who adopted the position of the 'amateur éclairé' (enlightened amateur).[47] Yet the essays he wrote about painting in the 1940s have long been seen as attempts to explain the trilogy of fiction he was writing at the time: *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnameable* (1953). In his 'Three Dialogues' (1949), he admits that he is concerned less with the work of the artist Bram van Velde 'than what I am pleased to fancy he does'. This fancy was

[43] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 244. [44] Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 244–5. [45] Woolf, *Essays*, vol. 5, p. 139.
[46] Woolf, *Essays*, vol. 6 (ebook).
[47] S. Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: J. Calder, 1983), p. 118.

that van Velde's painting was the 'first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail' in the attempt to relate the subject and object of representation, the same failure that would preoccupy Beckett to his last work of fiction, *Worstward Ho* (1983).[48] In its abrupt conclusion, Beckett's essay performs the failure of language to write about art, at least in its traditional ekphrastic sense. In this, both Beckett's and Woolf's essays have significance beyond being commentaries on their own practice: they can be seen as their articulations of the aesthetic doctrines of medium specificity that were central to modernist aesthetic theory more broadly.[49]

For other modernists, writing about art enabled them to articulate their aesthetic programmes in a manner closer to the manifesto, convinced – more like Ruskin than any would dare to admit – that visual perception was a matter of cultural health. Many of the claims that Wyndham Lewis first announced in *BLAST* in 1914 were expanded upon in his later essays. In *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?* (1919), he demands 'a complete reform ... of every notion or lack of notion of the significance of the appearance of the world'.[50] The 'putrid dullness, hopeless deadly stare of the almost imbecile stupidity' that the man of the crowd is confronted with in modern London 'can hardly be expected to stimulate him either to buoyancy, obedience, or anything but boredom'.[51] This concern with the ways in which advertising, cinema, and new forms of visual culture were producing what he later would call a 'submissive, hypnotised public' would provide material for his satires in novels from *Tarr* (1918) to *The Apes of God* (1930).[52]

Among D.H. Lawrence's many essays, his writings on art also serve as covert manifestos for fiction. 'Introduction to these Paintings' (1929) exemplifies his style in its full swaggering pomp, detouring through the psychology of syphilis and the history of landscape painting before praising Paul Cézanne as 'the only really interesting figure in modern art'.[53] Cézanne achieved what Lawrence sought in his own paintings – and, indeed, his fiction – to depict the visual world not as is appears in our 'mental concepts' but as 'what the

[48] Ibid., p. 125.
[49] For a classic statement of modernist medium specificity, see C. Greenberg, 'The new sculpture' in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 139.
[50] W. Lewis, *The Caliph's Design: Architects! Where is Your Vortex?* (London: Egoist, 1919), p. 15.
[51] Ibid., p. 17.
[52] W. Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards (1927; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 94.
[53] D.H. Lawrence, *Late Essays and Articles*, ed. J.T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 204.

intuitions gather'.[54] For Lawrence, this was no aesthetic exercise; it was a social ideal, one which would reverse a fall from grace: the loss of 'the feeling of physical, flesh-and-blood kinship, and the substitution of an ideal, social or political oneness'.[55] That a return to intuition will redeem a fallen modernity, an idea constant across Lawrence's work, is clarified as much by visual art as by literary polemic.

The Essay between Fiction and Life Writing

In a 1951 survey of post-war British art, John Berger wrote: 'The fact is that the modern movement – with all its subdivisions – has now disintegrated; partisan discipline has disappeared and most of the theories have finally lost their precision in practice.' As a result, 'the critic cannot be, as he was in the Twenties, a confident dogmatic missionary. He must be an interpreter, aware of the validity, not only of the artist's intentions, but also of the layman's doubts.'[56] With his ground-breaking television series *Ways of Seeing* (1972), subsequently made into a book of seven essays (four using text and images and three using only images), Berger became one of the most widely read of these new interpreters at a time when British academic art writing was adopting the specialist vocabulary of French theory in the 1970s and 1980s. His work can be used to map a broader shift in the relationship of the art essay to other modes of writing. He continues the tradition, traceable from Ruskin, of the writer using the art essay as a form of social critique. Yet his writing also shows a newer blurring of the boundaries between the essay and the novel in ways that make reflections on art a starting point for questioning the relationship between fact and fiction, and between the self and its representation in writing.

Over the course of his career, Berger's essays moved from focusing on specific artists, like Pablo Picasso, to using art writing to explore more general questions about the relationship between subjectivity and visuality. *Ways of Seeing* begins: 'Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.'[57] When he writes that even before language, '[t]he eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world', we see that for Berger, and not just in this essay, 'the eye' is a synecdoche for 'the I'.[58] This is one reason why

[54] Ibid., p. 202. [55] Ibid., p. 190.
[56] J. Berger, 'Present painting', *New Statesman & Nation*, 42:1080 (1951), 560.
[57] J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 7. [58] Ibid., p. 9.

writing about art becomes a means of writing about the self. This can be in the selves of fictional characters, as is the case in Berger's *A Painter of Our Time* (1958), wherein a Hungarian painter reveals the reasons for his exile in London by writing about art. But especially in Berger's later works, such as *Here is Where We Meet* (2006), the incorporation of essayistic reflections on vision serves to complicate the generic status of a text charting the encounters of the narrator 'John' with his dead mother. These are not quibbles of classification: they serve to present grief and loss as states in which fact and reality become hard to distinguish. This 'rich amalgam of novel, essay, and autobiography', according to the essayist Brian Dillon, was 'recognisably a genre which Berger long ago made his own'; it also, Dillon predicted, 'seems very much a genre of the future'.[59]

Dillon's observation was responding to the emergence of what loosely has been called autofiction, as one of the dominant strands of contemporary prose writing. One of the most influential figures drawing on the art essay as part of this melding of fiction and autobiography was W.G. Sebald. Indeed, when in 2014 Hari Kunzru tried to define this 'emerging genre', typified by the writings of Teju Cole, Geoff Dyer, Chris Kraus, Sheila Heti, or Ben Lerner, he termed it: 'the novel after Sebald, its nineteenth-century furniture of plot and character dissolved into a series of passages, held together by occasional photographs and a subjectivity that hovers close to (but is never quite identical with) the subjectivity of the writer'.[60] The importance of the essay to Sebald's dissolution of the scaffolding of the novel was registered in another attempt to define his work by the poet Michael Hamburger, who has described Sebald's works as 'essayistic semi-fiction which gives rope to both observation and imagination'.[61] Sebald was an accomplished essay writer, with collections focusing on the lives of writers and artists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jan Peter Tripp. What gives his prose works their 'essayistic' quality is that they are often structured along the lines of a biographical essay. *Vertigo* (1990), his first book, opens with an account of the life of Stendhal. *The Emigrants* (1992), his second, takes the form of four narratives about the lives of four émigrés, one of whom is a painter, Max Ferber, whose life was closely based on that of Frank Auerbach – so closely, in fact, that a photograph of Auerbach's eye included in the German edition was removed

[59] B. Dillon, 'Ghost written', *New Statesman* (11 April 2005), 56.
[60] H. Kunzru, 'Impossible mirrors', *New York Times* (7 September 2014), 12.
[61] M. Hamburger quoted in C. Angier, *Speak, Silence: In Search of W.G. Sebald* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 347–8.

at Auerbach's request in the English translation. When the art essay as a form of life writing – about one's encounter with art, and about the lives of artists – is incorporated into fiction, it challenges the borders between the novel and life writing, and between the shape of a story and the shape of a life.

Inclusion of images in his books is also a way in which Sebald drew on the conventions of art writing to question the generic conventions of fiction – and, as Auerbach's request shows, to reflect on the relationship between fact and fiction, and the ethics of visual representation.[62] In telling his story to the narrator, Ferber recalls a photograph of a book-burning in Nazi Germany in 1933 shown to him by his Uncle Leo, and a photograph of a book-burning is reproduced in the text. But, as Ferber recounts, that photograph was a 'forgery, since the burning took place in the evening'.[63] A forgery in the fictional world: what then is the status of the image presented to the reader? In an interview, Sebald stated that this image 'is a paradigm for the whole enterprise' of his work.[64] Writing about the image in his books is used to raise questions about the difference between fact and fiction when remembering the past. Images are also used to explore the nature of authorial subjectivity. *Austerlitz* (2001) is structured around the title character telling his life story to an unnamed narrator. When that narrator references taking a photograph of himself reflected in a shop window, that reflection shows Sebald himself. What representation of the self is achieved in fiction versus the supposedly non-fictional essay? Or in text as opposed to the image? Although Sebald's work often seems to evoke nostalgia for a pre-industrial age – the absence of technology, a parodically fusty and old-fashioned prose style evoking early nineteenth-century writers like Adalbert Stifter – its use of writing about images to raise the kinds of questions so central to contemporary visual culture is what has made it so influential on a later generation of writers.

The borders between the novel, the essay, and autobiography have never been as porous as they are now. And yet, despite digital technology intensifying the shift to an ever more predominately visual culture, the traditional art essay has continued to flourish in the practice of literary writers. Zadie Smith, for example, has brought her mastery of the essay to bear on contemporary art to provide some of her most searching explorations of

[62] For more on the ethics of visual representation in the essay, see K. Wittman's 'Of human suffering: the essay and ekphrasis' in this volume (Ch. 40).
[63] W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, trans. M. Hulse (London: Harvill, 1996), p. 183.
[64] Sebald quoted in A. Lubow, 'Crossing boundaries' in L.S. Schwaz (ed.), *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald* (New York: Seven Stories, 2007).

Blackness, identity, and aesthetic autonomy. In 'Getting In and Out: Who Owns Black Pain?' (2017), she responds to the controversy surrounding Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2016), a work that shows the corpse of Emmett Till, a Black adolescent who was killed in a lynching. Schutz, who is white, was criticised by the British artist Hannah Black for appropriating Black suffering as artistic material. If Black's critique focused on theories of 'free speech' and 'natural rights', Smith responded with the personal position of the essay: 'If I were an artist, and if I could paint – could the subject matter be mine?'[65] Rather than argument, she foregrounds affect: or rather, the lack thereof: 'When I looked at *Open Casket*, the truth is I didn't feel very much.'[66] With Smith's essay generating its own critiques across the online versions of *n+1*, *The Paris Review*, as well as (what else?) Twitter, it serves as a case study illustrating the ways in which the art essay can be a direct line for any writer into some of the central political debates of the moment.

The platforms facilitating the debate about *Open Casket*, characteristic of internet essay culture in which one viral essay generates many more, indicate the ways in which digital publishing has led to a renaissance of the essay in general, and the art essay in particular. New modes of dissemination are generating new forms of art writing and giving a voice to new generations of writers. Some are hybrid print-online publications like *The White Review*, which looks back to the spirit of the modernist little magazine in foregrounding the literary art essay over impersonal academic writing. Others are collaborative projects, like Gabrielle de la Puente and Zarina Muhammad's 'White Pube' project, which uses Twitter, blogging, and Substack to write scabrous essays on the whiteness of British art and its institutions. True to its protean nature, the art essay has transformed to embrace the possibilities of digital technology, and yet its concerns with subjectivity, identity, and art writing as a means of social critique have remained as pressing as ever.

[65] Z. Smith, 'Getting in and out: who own's Black pain?', *Harper's Magazine* (July 2017), https://harpers.org/archive/2017/07/getting-in-and-out/ (accessed 29 July 2023).
[66] Ibid.

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Of Human Suffering: The Essay and Ekphrasis

KARA WITTMAN

Often rendered as 'a verbal representation of a visual representation' or 'the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art', ekphrasis (after the Greek *ἔκφρασις*: 'description') has a long history of putting the explanatory, hermeneutic, and temporal affordances of words in dialogue (and usually in tension) with the representational, 'natural', sensuous, and spatial properties of the visual arts.[1] Much ekphrastic writing takes the form of poetry, as in William Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont'; Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci'; or W.H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts'. Much, but not all. Though the essay, as György Lukács tells us, is always about life, it sometimes takes art as its starting point because art encounters life and suspends it – gives it form, makes it visible.[2] Art is a handy starting point for the essay's potential to investigate life, because art has already taken bits of life – often the most difficult, occult bits – and given them form. The essayist takes that form and asks, what does it mean? What of life does it show us and what 'cannot be expressed by any gesture . . . yet long[s] for expression?'[3] The ekphrastic essay uses art as the starting point from which to ask questions about life, but also to ironise the answers, noticing both what it can see and what it never will. It unites the careful attention art demands of us with the digressive, associative, critical characteristics of the essay, extending our attention, slowing it down, protracting it.

[1] J.A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 3; L. Spitzer quoted in M. Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. xiii. For more on the debates surrounding the notion that visual art gets us closer to 'natural' or unmediated signs, see Krieger's *Ekphrasis*.

[2] For more on art and the essay, see K. Brazil's 'The eye and the I: essay and image' in this volume (Ch. 39).

[3] G. Lukács, 'On the nature and form of the essay' in *Soul and Form*, ed. J.T. Sanders and K. Terezakis, trans. A. Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 22.

In its commitment to noticing, its capacity at once to see and to be critical of the limits of its own sight, the ekphrastic essay is a genre of ekphrasis concerned with the representation of distress, human suffering, social and cultural strife. One of the most famous instances of ekphrasis is Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts', mentioned above, which comments on Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and to which Elisa Gabbert turns in her essay 'A Poem (and a Painting) about the Suffering that Hides in Plain Sight' (2022). Auden claims that the 'Old Masters' were never wrong about suffering, and Gabbert suggests that the history of ekphrasis is partly about efforts to represent suffering in ways that others might, at least, notice. Auden's ekphrasis on the barely-there figure of the drowning Icarus shows us that 'something is only a disaster if we notice it'.[4] Gabbert's essay draws this out, extends our looking. What the essay cannot *see*, because none of us really can, is the depth and reach of suffering. But it can, as Lukács tells us, *gesture* at the limits of its own sight; it can suspend the irreducibility of human experience, of human distress, before us and in so doing, ask that we notice.[5]

Suffering is not something we can share, Susan Sontag reminds us: 'No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain.'[6] Nonetheless, as this chapter will argue, ekphrastic essays take the problem of witnessing, of looking, as part of their formal logic. Committed to the 'irritating and dangerous aspects of the things that live in concepts', things that say *all is not well here, people are hurting*, in Theodor W. Adorno's words, the essay form 'wants to help language in its relation to concepts, to take them in reflection as they have been named unreflectingly in language'.[7] The ekphrastic essay can make this literal, subjecting to criticism the image of suffering imperfectly rendered, or incompletely reflected in the mirror of language. In short, this chapter offers a particular story of the ekphrastic essay as, above all, an effort to notice disaster, to represent human suffering.

[4] E. Gabbert, 'A poem (and a painting) about the suffering that hides in plain sight', *New York Times* (6 March 2022), www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/03/06/books/auden-musee-des-beaux-arts.html (accessed 29 July 2023).
[5] For Lukács on the essayistic gesture, see his 'On the nature and form of the essay', p. 22.
[6] S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 7.
[7] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form' in *Notes to Literature* (Combined Edition), ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. S.W. Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 37.

Ekphrasis: The Doubting Mind at Work

The Shield of Achilles does not exist, but anyone dwelling in the shadow of classical Western literature could probably conjure an image of it. Homer's long description in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* 'is paradigmatic, establishing conventions, contentions, and strategies that would inform ekphrastic poetry for centuries to come'.[8] 'And first Hephaestus makes a great and massive shield', the epic voice tells us,

> blazoning well-wrought emblems all across its surface
> raising a rim around it, glittering, triple-ply
> with a silver shield-strap run from edge to edge
> and five layers of metal to build the shield itself,
> and across its vast expanse with all his craft and cunning
> the god creates a world of gorgeous immortal work.[9]

For nearly 200 lines, the poet sings of the images carved into the shield: sublime images of the cosmos, the sky, of two great houses in their grand and humble celebrations and quibbles; sticky, pungent details of pooling blood and clustering grapes; and sequences of battles, courtships, and deaths. This is ekphrasis, as Murray Krieger puts it, the 'word-ridden and time-ridden attempt not only to portray visual representations but also to create verbal "pictures" whose complexity utterly resists their being translated into visual form'.[10] Over time, ekphrastic literature becomes less (or less uniquely) about describing imaginary objects like the epic shield or the pastoral poet's prize cup, and more about describing existing works of visual art, from paintings to urns. Thus we enter what James Heffernan calls a 'museum of words', where reading is looking and looking is reading, and where 'all ekphrastic literature from the age of Homer to our own' coalesces to form a distinct mode of writing, legible throughout literary history and characterised by distinguishable topoi and shared poetics.[11]

The scenes of struggle on Achilles's magnificent shield are not incidental to the history of ekphrastic literature. A charged point of contact between words and images, ekphrasis itself is also a site of conflict, a 'war of signs' called 'paragonal' after Leonardo da Vinci's *Paragone*, a manifesto on the

[8] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 9.
[9] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 483 (book 18, ll. 558–64).
[10] Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, p. xiv.
[11] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 4.

tension between visual and verbal art, painting and poetry.[12] Far exceeding in its implications the tension between words and images, this literary *paragon* has come to embody, as W.J.T. Mitchell writes, a conflict between 'all the antithetical values [a] culture wants to embrace or repudiate . . . [A] struggle between body and soul, world and mind, nature and culture.'[13] In our contemporary image-saturated moment, this struggle might seem dated, but ongoing debates about war photography, the question of publishing gruesome images in major media outlets, and even our lingering uncertainty about the impact of video games and cartoon violence are versions of the same debate. One of the questions the paragonal nature of ekphrasis forces us to ask is, what is the best way to represent suffering: words or images? And which words and which images? And if we choose the wrong way in the war of signs, what will that mean for us?

At its most hopeful, ekphrastic literature promises a synthesis of the verbal and visual, rich with the possibility of representing, seeing, and reading in new ways, which in turn might mean seeing and understanding more. It holds out the utopian promise of epistemic plenitude. But hope and desire can tip easily over into fear when things get too close, too promiscuous, too intermingled. Ekphrastic fear is a fear of haunted images, vampiric prose, unbidden ideas emerging through a canvas, or even, in our moments of looking, a 'surprise attack' by meaning.[14] Ekphrastic writing worries about the loss of categories, the proximity of the other, and tries to 'regulate the borders with firm distinctions between the senses, modes of representation, and the objects proper to each'.[15] If this begins to sound like social and political anxiety, reflecting deep-seated cultural fears about borderlands, miscegenation, immigration, and even revolution, that is because ekphrasis is also often a figure for and embodiment of encounters with alterity and the openness or revulsion with which we greet those encounters. It is, after all, no coincidence that one of the most beautiful things in the *Iliad* is etched onto an object that you use to protect yourself from the violence others intend, or that helps you do violence to others.

[12] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 47.
[13] Ibid., p. 49.
[14] Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 177; F. Tygstrup, 'De te fabula narrator! Violence and representation in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*' in C. Armstrong and U. Langås (eds.), *Terrorizing Images: Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), p. 20.
[15] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 155.

Later nineteenth- and twentieth-century essayists embrace these tensions in ekphrastic essays by turning the experience of indifference, hope, and fear into an engine of criticism and even activism. Before the essay entered literary tradition, the dominant form for ekphrastic writing in Western history was verse. *Ut pictura poesis*, the phrase from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, tells us: 'as is painting, so is poetry'.[16] As Krieger suggests, poetry has been central to the history of ekphrasis because poetic language has always been more than referential, more than a transparent medium for some message. In ekphrasis, poetry has been 'atop the hierarchy of the arts' by virtue of its power to represent the triumph over time *in time*, to freeze time like a picture while operating in a temporal medium – language, which carries inexorable traces of time in its syntax.[17] For Krieger, 'the special and two-sided role assigned the language medium in poetry allows it to supervise the paradoxical existence of time and space, of the sensible and the intelligible, of mimesis and free-ranging expression', which gives us some sense of why poetry figures so centrally in efforts to capture the visual in the verbal. Caught between visual expression and music, which spent much of Western history as the antipodes of the mimetic arts, he tells us, poetry faces both ways.[18]

Ekphrastic writing, facing both ways, embodies paragonal hope and fear by telling us something about the image, translating the image into a new form (and music, in the case of poetry), but never quite knowing all there is to know. Consider, for example, John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', which rivals the Shield of Achilles for pride of place in the ekphrastic canon of poetry. Keats's experiments with the ode, Anahid Nersessian argues, show us a form 'at once descriptively terse and psychologically diffuse . . . suspended between surfeit and longing, stillness and forward momentum'.[19] The Grecian urn is there to be seen but not known. The 'foster-child of silence and slow time', it invites description but the description takes the form of questions that go unanswered: 'What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape? . . . / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? . . . / Who are these coming to the sacrifice?' Instead, as critics have observed, the urn offers

[16] For more on Horace's *ut pictura poesis*, see, e.g. G.E. Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. E.A. McCormack (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

[17] Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, p. 206. Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. and trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 203.

[18] Ibid.

[19] A. Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 4.

up what some read as an unhelpful platitude, others an embodiment of what drives the ekphrastic urge in the first place: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'[20] Can beauty speak truth? Can truth be transliterated from the beautiful?[21]

Keats's ode is an ekphrastic effort that stretches out and slows our perception, refuses certainty, illustrates his concept of 'negative capability', or 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.[22] More than that, Nersessian, following Geoffrey Hartman, suggests that this ode offers not knowledge but 'nescience', poetry's 'negatively informative character', which confounds rather than clarifies.[23] A verbal representation of a visual representation that shows us as much what we do not know as what we might, Keats's impassively rotating urn, and his 'Urn', describe a hole at the heart of our certainty.

The sense that we do not know everything (or even much), and that we should doubt our certainty and our perception, links Keats's modern poetic ekphrasis with another modern literary form, the essay. The ekphrastic essays of Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) show us the doubting mind at work, confronting visual works and artists from the European Renaissance by asking, if we train our modern doubt on these objects, what might we notice? Throughout *The Renaissance*, Pater uses the doubting errantry of the essay form to push at the boundary between the visual and the verbal and test what language can activate in static images to confirm our doubts, motivate our questions, and in many cases – anticipating Adorno's provocative language in 'The Essay as Form' – excite our heresies. His moody excursus on Sandro Botticelli's Madonna, for example, understands her as more human than saint, more frustrated mother than martyr. 'For with Botticelli she too', he writes, 'though she holds in her hands the "Desire of all nations," is one of those who are neither for God nor for his enemies and her choice is on her face.'[24] Pater finds desire and regret in the

[20] J. Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian urn' in *Complete Poems*, ed. J. Stillinger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 282–3.

[21] See, e.g., S.J. Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); J. Stillinger, 'Who says what to whom at the end of "Ode on a Grecian urn?"', *PMLA*, 73 (1958), 447–78; Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p. 114.

[22] J. Keats, *Selected Letters*, ed. J. Barnard (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 79.

[23] Nersessian, *Calamity Form*, pp. 3–4; G. Hartman, 'On traumatic knowledge and literary studies', *New Literary History*, 26:3 (1995), 537.

[24] W. Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 32.

Madonnas, lives not lived – interrupted by the 'intolerable honour'; he sees traces of past and future in the seemingly atemporal paintings: 'Men go forth to their labours in the evening; but she is awake before them, and you might think the sorrow in her face was at the thought of the whole long day yet to come.'[25] Here, fifty years *avant la lettre*, are Auden's ploughmen, going about their work while Icarus falls; here is the suffering that is a disaster because we notice it, or as the case may be, dare to essay it.

Pater's reading of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, 'La Gioconda', is perhaps the most famous example of his ekphrastic essayism. For Pater, essaying the painting reveals the temporality latent within the Mona Lisa, a temporality that is 'older than the rocks among which she sits':

> like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave, and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary, and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes.[26]

A symbol for the ravages and promises of time, Pater sees her as 'the embodiment of the old fancy' (the transmigration of souls) and 'the symbol of the modern idea' (evolution).[27] Either way, or as both, she is a figure in whom, as soon as we perceive the traces of time, we also bear witness to the duration of her suffering. Pater's reading asks us to doubt, to set aside our ready certainty in the face of this art, and question what cannot be represented (in the stillness of the image, the limits of its frame, the aesthetic demands it tries to meet), what suffering this beauty catalogues without ever pointing directly to it.

The essay understands, Adorno writes, that to meet our modern 'demand for strict definition' and 'conceptually identical' representation, we have manufactured truth, which upholds an immiserating status quo. We are afraid of what threatens our fragile truth, he says, and will do violence to it. Rejecting this fear, the essay organises itself around a critical impulse: the 'heretical' repudiation of official thought, 'the essayistic detail' that works to reveal the untruth of official truths.[28] In the twentieth century, ekphrastic essayists staged this rejection as they worked through the ekphrastic encounter, the vertices of the 'triangular relationship: something is depicted, a medial formatting of it, and a mode of subjective reception'.[29] What's more,

[25] Ibid., p. 33. [26] Ibid., p. 70. [27] Ibid., p. 71. [28] Adorno, 'Essay as form', p. 39.
[29] Tygstrup, 'De te fabula narrator!', p. 16.

ekphrastic essayists can draw into this encounter the layered questions of objectivity, witnessing, and the treacherous promise that one can look at a work of art or a photograph and say, accurately, what any given image represents.[30] In this way, the ekphrastic essayist can gesture towards the negative space, the gap in positive representation, the hole, we might say, limned by Keats's urn. And in so gesturing, the essayist calls our attention back even to the 'smallest trace of senseless suffering' that has been silenced or elided.[31]

Essayism, Ekphrasis, and Photography

Living in close proximity to visual artists and at the dawn of cinema, Virginia Woolf says much about art, and the influence of the visual (painting, photography, and moving images) suffuses her writing. More than a few of her essays are ekphrases: her forewords to Vanessa Bell's exhibition catalogues of 1930 and 1934; her 1934 *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, and a handful of other short descriptive pieces.[32] Woolf was deeply interested in what the 'silent, still' art of painting and the restless verbosity of writing might do for each other – the possibility that 'painting and writing have much to tell each other'.[33] She found great richness in the idea that words cannot visit the silent realms of visual art, and also found great provocation and possibility in exploring this forbidden landscape.

In *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf uses the relative freedom of the essay form to entertain complicated questions about how we read and respond to images and what kinds of thinking – and action – those images may or may not make possible. The pretext is that some unidentified man has written to the essayist asking, 'How in your opinion are we to prevent war?'[34] When she consents to answer him, she uses the question as an invitation to meditate on several related issues: women's education and women's rights; our reactions to violence and bellicosity; and the possibility of thinking in a society and a world that puts various and sometimes extreme demands on our loyalties, affections, and desires. She achieves this rhetorical

[30] See A. Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 12.
[31] T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 203.
[32] For a discussion of the modernist essay in the context of film, see M. Wood's 'Undiplomatic relations: modernism and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 36), and for an account of the preface as essay, see Mario Aquilina's discussion in 'The preface essay' in this volume (Ch. 29).
[33] V. Woolf, *Oh, To Be a Painter!* (New York: D. Zwirner Books, 2020), p. 77.
[34] V. Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938; Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2012), p. 7.

plate-spinning by referencing two collections of photographs, which allows for competing ekphrases.

One type of ekphrasis is direct and readily communicable to the reader; it comprises what Andrew D. Miller calls 'ekphrastic calligrams', or photographs that appear alongside the text and allow the reader to form her own relationship to the image.[35] The original essay was published with five photographs of men in various and elaborate robes of office – judicial, educational, ecclesiastical, political, and martial. Like the portraits she writes about in 'Pictures and Portraits' (1920) and *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, these photographs seem to hold silence at their centre, forbidding language while at the same time, by virtue of their ersatz sublimity, demanding reverence and consent. We have to move some distance with Woolf along the long and tightly woven thread of her argument before we realise that she understands these photographs of costumed and decorated men in various positions of state, church, and academic power as images of violence, as themselves indices of the suffering meted out or sanctioned by their various offices.

The second set of images we never see, and they're harder to label as a particular type of ekphrasis for this reason. They fall somewhere between Miller's 'snapshot elegy' ekphrasis in which the speaker or writer gives us access to the dead, and the 'notional ekphrasis' that describes something we can't look directly at (and, as in the case of Achilles's shield, might not exist). These photographs, however, do exist. We're asked to hear them described *as* we look at the printed photographs of caparisoned men. 'Here, then, on the table before us are photographs', Woolf writes:

> The Spanish Government sends them with patient pertinacity about twice a week. They are not pleasant photographs to look upon. They are photographs of dead bodies for the most part. This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house.[36]

The Spanish Civil War, Sontag reminds us, was the first to be 'witnessed ("covered") in the modern sense: by a corps of professional photographers at lines of military engagement, and in the towns under bombardment', and the images Woolf describes would have been well known to her contemporary

[35] A.D. Miller, *Poetry, Photography, Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photographs from the 19th Century to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 6.
[36] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 20.

readers.[37] Sontag questions the assumptions Woolf seems to make in her ekphrastic writing about these photographs: that the photographs she describes would be described by others in the same way, that she and her anonymous interlocutor are seeing the same thing, and that the suffering to which the photographs bear witness will lead both viewers and, we take it, those of us reading the ekphrastic essay they inspire to condemn war. 'Is it true', Sontag asks, that these shocking photographs 'could only stimulate the repudiation of war?'[38]

The answer of course is *no*; for Woolf to assume this would put her in an early and credulous category of ekphrastic writing about photographs. Ciceronic, Miller calls it, believing that the photograph is speaking its own essence.[39] But whatever naivete Woolf might betray about photographs and consensus, *Three Guineas* is an essay.[40] Woolf's long, layered essay uses the two counterpoised ekphrases to consider what we do *not* see, what is hidden in the images. 'Whatever its localized concerns', Randi Saloman writes, 'the real project of *Three Guineas* is not to arrive at a plan for eliminating war, but rather to offer a model for, and an instance of, protecting individual thought – the exercise of which, it is assumed implicitly and explicitly throughout the text must be sustained and encouraged at all costs'.[41] For Saloman, this commitment to critical thought that reaches no conclusion, but encourages further sustained thought, marks this piece as an essay. And its twinned ekphrases are essential to its project. Those published photographs of various institutional dress – the bishop, the barrister – are, we come to see, photographs of suffering. The war photographs she seems to imagine will lead us all to a condemnation of war are photo-negatives of the ostentatious state photographs: the sense of power and truth we feel when we look at images of the imperious robes of the Chancellor of Cambridge University or the Archbishop of Canterbury's bejewelled crucifix yields to our realisation that *these* photographs are the war photographs.

This is why the combination of the essayistic, ekphrastic, and photographic is powerful: the photograph wants to index the real but cannot; the ekphrasis, in its ekphrastic hope, wants to give language to that real; the essay, a form of judgment, of longing, says no to both. The public and the private

[37] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 21. [38] Ibid., p. 8.
[39] Miller, *Poetry, Photography, Ekphrasis*, p. 4.
[40] On this, see also R. Rainof's 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 34).
[41] R. Saloman, *Virginia Woolf's Essayism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 94.

worlds, Woolf concludes, the patriarchs and the women and children in the war photographs, the sublime and the suffering,

> are inseparably connected . . . the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and civilities of the other. But the human figure even in a photograph suggests other and more complex emotions. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure and that we are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting disobedience but our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure.[42]

The ekphrastic essay, a form of resistance to passive looking and servility, offers Woolf a model for the kind of thinking she values, that might at least be worth her guinea.

The Cine-Essay as Ekphrasis

The multiplication of contrasts and changes that film offers over the course of the twentieth century transforms ekphrasis and the ekphrastic essay more, perhaps, than the invention of photography did or could. For much of its history, ekphrasis was understood as a struggle not only between image and word, but between space and time: the still, silent space of the visual image and the restless narrative time of the verbal description. What's more, this tension between the spatial and the temporal, the still and the kinetic, has been understood by various critics as essentially ideological and frequently racialised and gendered, as the still, feminised object confronts the marginalising and subordinating gaze of the ekphrastic writer.[43] Disrupting this relationship is a political project, one concerned with representations of trauma and suffering in ways that extend beyond what Woolf can do with her photographs.

Claus Clüver has suggested that the original concept of ekphrasis as a 'verbal representation of a visual representation' be re-understood as 'the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system or medium'.[44] Laura M. Sager Eidt adds that filmic ekphrasis is more than a paragon of visual and verbal: 'filmic ekphrasis can forgo all verbal

[42] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, p. 258.

[43] See, e.g., Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, and N. Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[44] C. Clüver, 'On gazers' encounters with visual art: ekphrasis, readers, "iconotexts"' in D. Kennedy and R. Meek (eds.), *Ekphrastic Encounters* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 237.

discourse in favor of a purely visual and auditory one'.[45] In fact, this introduction of aural elements into the representational and interpretative landscape is something early writing on the 'essay film' points to as definitional. Take this ecstatic outburst from Alexandre Astruc's 1948 'The Future of Cinema', in which Astruc declares that the future language of cinema 'is that of the essay':

> the camera in the right pants pocket, the recording on a picture soundtrack, of twists and turns, and the frantic unfurling of our imaginary universe, the cinema-confession, essay, revelation, message, psychoanalysis, obsession, a machine that reads the words and images of our personal landscape, the totality of things, objects, beings, rocks, cities, the gestures and complaints of a universe returned to the role of material, the art in which one paints with tense faces and writes with the guttural sounds of slaughtered seals.[46]

Or, with somewhat less hyperventilation, André Bazin's articulation of Chris Marker's 'montage formed from ear to eye': 'the basic element' in Marker's essay films', he writes, 'is the beauty of what is said and heard, that intelligence flows from the audio element to the visual'.[47]

The introduction of movement and sound changes the ekphrastic triangle; sound can render the ekphrasis internal to the film, so that we listen to an ekphrastic reading of the image we too are encountering, and this is not unidirectional: the images, in sequence or montage, also 'read' the text for us. Or, as Siglind Bruhn might suggest, the film score itself performs ekphrastically.[48] This layered, multimedial ekphrasis is something British filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s explore in their watershed essay films, and I will conclude by looking at three instances.

The first is Derek Jarman's final film *Blue* (1993). The only image in the film is the International Klein Blue colour projected on a screen without interruption for the 79-minute duration of the film. Jarman imagined the film in ekphrastic terms from its conception; it was to be a meditation on looking 'Into the Blue' (the title of a chapter from his 1994 book-length essay, *Chroma: A Book of Color – June '93*). Looking into the blue was looking into the void, looking into the disease (AIDS) that was killing him and had already claimed

[45] L.M. Sager Eidt, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* (New York: Rodopi, 2008), p. 24.
[46] A. Astruc, 'The future of cinema' in N. Alter and T. Corrigan (eds.), *Essays on the Essay Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 100.
[47] A. Bazin, 'Bazin on Marker' in Alter and Corrigan (eds.), *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 104.
[48] See S. Bruhn, *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000).

thousands, looking through the damaged retinas of his own eyes in a 'haze of belladonna'; it was looking into the 'universal love in which man bathes' and also into death.[49] We watch the blue and listen to the voices speaking, Jarman's own and those of his handful of narrators. We also listen to the soundtrack – music, ambient noises, bells, birds. Blue, in these extended ekphrases, is the sky, the 'blood of sensibility', the 'long dried paint' of a room in the hospital, eyes, bruises, 'submarine gardens', and, finally, the blue of a single delphinium: 'Blue, upon your grave.'[50]

Looking into the blue, we might experience something like Mitchell's 'ekphrastic fear . . . that the imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually'; colour becomes language – a way of speaking, not speaking's passive foil.[51] This blue is not the 'other' of language. Instead, the blue 'articulates silence'; the blue void, the music, the protracted echoes of the bells, the voiceover scripts all combine to ask what the blue is saying that nothing else can say.[52] 'As the self-observation of dying', Timothy Corrigan writes, '*Blue* becomes a self-portrait of a dying body turning from the inside of subjectivity to the outside of the world, or, perhaps, infusing and restoring that dying inside with all that is outside . . . an endlessly blue leader where essayistic thinking becomes the recognition of continually expanding and echoing insight.'[53] Looking into the blue makes other suffering visible. 'O Blue come in', he intones; 'I am sitting with some friends in this café drinking coffee served by young refugees from Bosnia. The war rages across the newspapers and through the ruined streets of Sarajevo.' War is everywhere, Jarman's essay film says, 'the earth is dying'; the film drifts across an unseen expanse of human suffering connected by a thin tissue of blue.

John Akomfrah made his 1986 *Handsworth Songs*, an experimental film about police brutality against young Black men in the UK with his group, the Black Audio Film Collective. Black Audio was formed by seven undergraduate collaborators in Portsmouth who sensed the potential of the cine-essay to unite their politics and aesthetics, to interrupt existing representations of identity, Blackness, diaspora, migration, and colonialism in the aesthetic landscape. *Handsworth Songs* juxtaposes found footage of the Handsworth riots – uprisings in the early 1980s in Birmingham's Handsworth district by straitened and terrorised community members against the police – with

[49] D. Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Color* (New York: Overlook Press, 1994), p. 122.
[50] D. Jarman (dir.), *Blue*, Zeitgeist Films, 1993.
[51] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 154.
[52] T. Peake, *Derek Jarman: A Biography* (New York: Little, Brown, 1999), p. 515.
[53] T. Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 103.

images of giants in the ongoing civil rights struggles, voiceovers from Black British civilians and eyewitnesses to the riots, and music (everything from national hymns to electronic sounds) to ask difficult questions about Britain's colonial history, the ongoing demonisation of Black British residents, and the relationship between immigrants filled with hope for their new life and the 1981 and 1985 Handsworth uprisings.

Salman Rushdie pulled no punches in his 1987 review of *Handsworth Songs*: 'Unfortunately', he declared, 'it's no good.'[54] It was not any good, he maintained, because it did not tell the right stories in the right way. It showed images that people 'know from TV', images of different subjects of colonial, state, and police violence, but did not say anything new about those images.[55] In 1995, however, Rushdie admitted that at the time, he 'just didn't get it'.[56] What he did not get, Akomfrah and Lina Gopaul suggest, is that the essay film was pushing at precisely this ekphrastic hope (that word and image could satisfy each other) in order to challenge and destabilise that hope. The words and images were not meant to be mutually illustrative, nor was the soundtrack meant to line up our affective responses with the subjects and their 'rich' stories. We were not given a consumable package of what to think; we were to think.

Handsworth Songs, along with twenty-first-century works like *Peripeteia* (2012), *The Stuart Hall Project* (*The Unfinished Conversation*) (2013), *Vertigo Sea* (2015), and even Akomfrah's most recent meditation on the Covid-19 pandemic and the Movement for Black Lives, *Five Murmurations* (2021), works as Nora Alter writes, along metonymic and metaphoric axes.[57] Working across multiple large-scale screens, the films juxtapose images layered with music and sometimes written words, and ask the viewer to determine what the images say to each other, what they reveal, obscure, ask, or doubt. In *Vertigo Sea*, for example, one screen projects the serene underbelly of a marine mammal in a well of blue water; a second, the migration of seabirds; and the third, a figure dressed as the eighteenth-century abolitionist, author, and freed slave Olaudah Equiano, gazing out to sea from a foggy, half-lit shoreline. In another, a still-living polar bear is dragged supine across an

[54] S. Rushdie, 'Songs doesn't know the score', *Guardian* (12 January 1987), reprinted in J. Proctor (ed.), *Writing Black Britain, 1948–1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 261–3.

[55] Ibid.

[56] J. Akomfrah and L. Gopaul, 'Reconsidering *Handsworth Songs*', Massachusetts Institute of Technology, YouTube (posted 30 October 2012), www.youtube.com/watch?v=HENGmQluZb4 (accessed 30 July 2023).

[57] N. Alter, *John Akomfrah* (London: Lisson Gallery, 2016), p. 5.

arctic landscape while on another screen a man dressed in a uniform – ambiguously martial, colonial, and blood-sporting – sits next to the trussed carcass of a deer. The language projected on the screen is sometimes from Herman Melville, at other times from the poet and political activist Heathcote Williams; the sea in some images is cerulean, and in others filled with the blood of a dying whale. Men shoot harpoons; men are in chains.

In some ways, the side-by-side screens of these installation films are more montage than ekphrasis, and illustrate the coordinative, associative function of the essay in real time – the dialectical thinking Adorno sees as essential to the essay and that Akomfrah mobilises in his work. But in other ways, Akomfrah's films exemplify the kind of thinking that ekphrasis makes possible. As Sager Eidt points out, ekphrastic cinema intensifies the paragonal struggle because one image is not necessarily inert, passively subject to the examination in language of a poet, essayist, or the audience of either. The images move against each other; the ensanguined seas *describe* the dress of the colonial official; the migrating seabirds and the humans in the stockades ask what it means to see them as describing each other. In this way, Akomfrah pushes at the capacity for ekphrastic essays to challenge sight, memory, and the possibility of representing suffering. What Rushdie 'didn't get' about Akomfrah's essayistic project, Kobena Mercer observes, is that Rushdie 'enact[ed] an authoritarian practice of "interpretation" which assumes *a priori* that one version of reality, his political analysis of Handsworth, has more validity, legitimacy, and authority than another, the version put forward in the film', and in doing so, missed entirely the point.[58] The point was to open up what Akomfrah calls the 'pariah space' of the essay, a protean space between defined aesthetic forms that experiments with different ways of knowing; a space, the filmmaker muses, that looks 'back to the very understanding of the word essay, which is not to *write*, but to make sense'.[59]

This inability to make sense while wanting to do so is at the heart of *Frozen War* (2001), an 11-minute essay film by the journalist and filmmaker John Smith. This film was made a month after the attacks on the World Trade Center in the United States, on the eve of the retaliatory bombing of Afghanistan by the United States and its allies, Britain among them. Of the

[58] K. Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 55.

[59] J. Akomfrah, 'On essays, identities, and Stuart Hall' (interview), *Frieze*, 27 (7 February 2014), www.frieze.com/video/john-akomfrah-essays-identities-and-stuart-hall (accessed 29 July 2023).

BBC NEWS 24
www.bbc.co.uk
STRIKE ON AFGHANISTAN
A second night of strikes completed, targets in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad hit
01.41

Figure 40.1. The frozen BBC telecast. *Frozen War*. Ireland, October 2001. Film still.

seven films that make up *Hotel Diaries*, *Frozen War*, the inaugural film of that sequence, was the only one made spontaneously. As such, it is essentially essayistic: the reflections of a filmmaker looking at the image of a frozen BBC newscaster on his television at 1:41 in the morning on 8 October 2001.

There are only two images, really, in the film. The premise of the dominant image is simple: the filmmaker has turned on a BBC newscast and is 'confronted with a static image'; sometime in the middle of announcing the early British strikes against Kabul, the newscast froze.[60] What follows is an 11-minute meditation on the frozen image: the talking head, the time stamp, the headline, the BBC logo (Fig. 40.1).

As he describes the image, zooming in and out on the face, the time stamp, the individual letters of the words on screen, the narrator ponders, among other things, the violence happening off-screen, truths about the conflict and its immiserating consequences that the man on the BBC will not share, or the potential cause of the frozen broadcast: 'Could that frozen image represent a moment when the BBC transmitter was blown up? The BBC studios ceased to exist at 1:41 a.m.?' He pauses: 'Might do.' 'That guy's

[60] J. Smith (dir.), *Frozen War*, Ireland, 8 October 2001 (SD video).

Figure 40.2. The useless bit of furniture. *Frozen War*. Ireland, October 2001. Film still.

expression might represent the moment when he heard a sound, felt a vibration, that told him everything wasn't as he thought it was.'[61]

The narrator's muted description of the image in front of us, and his own anxious reaction to it, measures the distance between an interrupted broadcast and an interrupted life: 'What's happened in London? Probably fuck all. Probably nothing's happened in fucking London ... A lot's happened in Afghanistan.'[62] Here, we are returned to Gabbert, to Auden, to Brueghel: the splash, inaudible to the viewer, barely visible on the canvas, that is Icarus dying. The ploughmen, shepherd, and fisherman go about their day in Brueghel's painting, and the ekphrasis registers more than what *can* be shared about the suffering: that which cannot.

The second image is of a luggage stand, a 'bit of furniture' that becomes the narrator's bête noire (Fig. 40.2). The narrator's effort to make sense of the luggage stand becomes, in *Frozen War*, something cine-ekphrastic: an effort to render the visual in language, and also the failure of that effort. No description of the stilled human figure on the screen could capture the suffering it gestures towards, but the luggage stand becomes that effort. A useless thing in the visual field that makes language stutter, slows down perception, turns us to what we should commit ourselves to *trying to see* even when we cannot. It makes us realise that the filmmaker is sitting in Cork

[61] Ibid., 6:52. [62] Ibid., 3:47.

rather than travelling through the world of action or doing anything about the violence in Afghanistan; makes us realise that something will always exceed our field of sense-making and that this something is often suffering, that we should doubt as often as we are certain or complacent. The useless piece of furniture recalls Viktor Shklovsky on what happens when the world becomes something we have seen too many times: 'And so, held accountable for nothing, life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war.'[63]

While it might seem perverse of the narrator to insist that we stare at the luggage stand in *Frozen War*, this is the job of the ekphrastic essayist: to insist that we stare until we see, and in seeing, come to ask what we cannot see. What fear of war did we lose when we stopped noticing that 'useless fucking bit of furniture'?[64] Whether with hope or with fear, the ekphrastic essay insists that we slow down and notice.

[63] V. Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. B. Sher, intro. G. Bruns (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 5.
[64] Smith (dir.), *Frozen War*, 10:44.

41

After Empire: Postcolonialism and the Essay

SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

In 'Reading and Writing, a Personal Account', the prologue to his 2004 collection *Literary Occasions: Essays*, V.S. Naipaul describes the complex nature of his early desire for a career in letters: 'I wished to be a writer', he writes, 'But together with the wish there had come the knowledge that the literature that had given me the wish came from another world, far away from our own.'[1] Naipaul would eventually go on to correct the sad exclusion of the Caribbean islands from literary history in his novels, but the story of this exclusion is contained most evocatively in his personal essays. His remark upon the alien nature of his writerly vocation is the clue for what I intend to explore in this chapter: the imagination of a personal and collective self, particularly through the provocative tension between Western literature and native development, that shapes the postcolonial essay in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The tradition of life writing is essential to the postcolonial essay in English, as becomes evident with some of its most exciting exponents from different parts of the former British Empire. This form of writing as an intimate way of reckoning with history involves the examination of a marginalised identity, which the essayist recrafts in a singular voice that articulates a greater communal identity. Beginning with pioneering figures such as Naipaul and Chinua Achebe, I trace this self-imagination in the essays of Nadine Gordimer, Zoë Wicomb, Shashi Deshpande, and Amit Chaudhuri. In their reckoning with the literary education they received as colonial or postcolonial subjects, these writers offer a crucial itinerary of the cultural politics that inform the postcolonial essay as a species of life writing.

[1] V.S. Naipaul, Prologue in *Literary Occasions: Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 4.

Alienation as Growth

Apart from the fragmented journalistic imagination of his father, Seeparsad Naipaul, a writer for *The Trinidad Guardian*, V.S. Naipaul had very little around him from which to draw by way of a literary tradition. Writing 'was a private idea, and a curiously ennobling one, separate from school and separate from the disordered and disintegrating life of our Hindu extended family'.[2] The peculiar predicament of a colonial legacy of education introduced him to Western Romantic notions of authorship and creativity, which he slowly realised could become his own. And yet the absurdity of these notions in the culture and community he inhabited in the tiny and remote island of Trinidad, at great geographic and historic removes from the Western metropolitan centres from whence these notions came, glared at him throughout the early years of his literary growth.

The literature that played a formative role for him was 'of peculiar authority; but that literature was also like an alien mythology'.[3] 'There was, for instance', he wrote, 'Wordsworth's notorious poem about the daffodil. A pretty little flower, no doubt; but we had never seen it. Could the poem have any meaning for us?'[4] Naipaul was not past recognising the parochial politics implicit in this question. He realised that this approach might render all writings meaningless beyond 'countries of their origin'.[5] In the end, it was a reflection not of the reality of alien flowers, or of the literature they indexed, but of his own society, of its marginality and formlessness: 'It was really an expression of the dissatisfaction of the emptiness of our own formless, unmade society.'[6]

The inevitable realisation was that all literature was doomed to be alien to a society without a significant historic and cultural consciousness of its own: 'To us, without a mythology, all literatures were foreign. Trinidad was small, remote and unimportant, and we knew we could not hope to read in books of the life we saw about us.'[7] In such a location – unforgettably described by Jamaica Kincaid as 'a small place'[8] – the idea and the reality of literature could only be a foreign fantasy. Distant in space and excluded from history, such places and communities could never be the subject of literature. Even though Naipaul left Trinidad for Oxford on a government scholarship at the age of eighteen, it would take him several years to start writing seriously, for he lacked the inherited confidence of a writer from a metropolitan culture: 'My

[2] Ibid., p. 3. [3] V.S. Naipaul, 'Jasmine' in *Literary Occasions*, p. 37. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid. [6] Ibid. [7] Ibid. [8] I refer to the title of Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988).

material had not been sufficiently hallowed by a tradition; I was not fully convinced of its importance; and some embarrassment remained.'[9]

There is a sense of alienation and longing at the heart of this self-making that makes the essay, with its generic ambivalence and perpetually unfinished nature, a particularly apt medium of life writing. The title of one of Naipaul's essays, 'East Indian' (1965), contains the pathos of an anomalous identity elaborated with moving melancholy. While the structures of the temples and mosques of South Asian immigrants, many of them indentured labourers, continue to appear genuine, 'the languages that came with them' have long decayed in the West Indies, for 'the West Indies are part of the New World and these Indians of Trinidad are no longer of Asia'.[10] Since cremations are forbidden, Hindus are buried. There is no Ganges in which to perform the last rites, 'only a muddy stream called the Caroni'; the holy city of Benares is thousands and thousands of miles away, but 'the young Hindu at his initiation ceremony in Port of Spain will still take up his staff and beggar's bowl and say that he is off to Benares to study'. His relatives will pretend to plead with him, and in the end, he will relent and lay down his staff, and there will be 'a ritual expression of relief'. It is the ironic ritual of an identity shaped at a strange distance from itself.

If to be a Black Caribbean, as Kincaid writes later, is to be subject to a complete erasure of historical memory, to be a descendant of South Asian indentured labourers in these islands is to know of the existence of an ancestral culture but be woefully cut off from it. 'It is', Naipaul writes, 'the play of people who have been cut off.' There is an essential absurdity in the very existence of the Indian in Trinidad. 'To be an Indian from Trinidad, then', he continues, 'is to be unlikely and exotic. It is also to be a little fraudulent.' This sense of the absurd would push him towards many explorations of cultural identity throughout his literary life. In his 2001 Nobel lecture, published as the postscript to *Literary Occasions*, he shared the story of his accidental stumbling upon the only historic references he could find to his ancestral name. It was in an '1872 gazetteer-like British work about India, Hindu Castes and Tribes as Represented in Benares', where he found some groups of Nepalese in Benares 'who carried the name Naipaul'.[11] Nothing else, ever. 'That is all', he wrote, 'that I have.' Unlike, say, a French child for

[9] Naipaul, 'Jasmine', p. 38.
[10] V.S. Naipaul, 'East Indian' in *Literary Occasions*, p. 33. And for following quotations.
[11] V.S. Naipaul, 'Postscript: Two worlds' in *Literary Occasions*, p. 160. And for following quotations.

whom the knowledge of their heritage is simply 'waiting' for them, is 'all around them', Naipaul recalls a life, as he holds a Nobel Prize in Literature, where that knowledge was nowhere – one which he had to create through his own writing.

The legacy of oppression his colonial education acknowledged was perfunctory and abstract, but as he indicates in the prologue to *Literary Occasions*, it signalled a suffering people whose pain felt too unbearable even to think about:

> At school, in the history class, slavery was only a word. One day in the school yard, in Mr Worm's class, when there was some talk of the subject, I remember trying to give meaning to the word: looking up to the hills to the north of the city and thinking that those hills would have once been looked upon by people who were not free. The idea was too painful to hold on to.[12]

The failure to hold on to an idea can sometimes be enabling, especially for people who live in the margins. 'Whether we desire mastery over a slave, an environment, or a body of texts', Julietta Singh writes in *Unthinking Mastery*, 'we are always returning to this primordial fracture – to the partial destruction of the object that the would-be master yearns to govern over completely.'[13] Mastery involves a form of submission, something that necessarily needs to be objectified, whether that something is internal or external to the master. The narrative of mastery enforces an exclusionary image of humanity, where the victory of the master depends on his violent domination of a subordinate entity, be it an individual, a group, or a form of knowledge. A similar logic of success and failure has also been called into question by queer theorists, who read success in contemporary society as an inevitable act of complicity between heteronormativity and capitalism.[14]

'Under certain circumstances', Jack Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, 'failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world.'[15] For queer people, failure can be a style, Halberstam argues, citing Quentin Crisp, or, as Michel Foucault would have it, a way of life. Self-construction, in the work of such writers, harnesses the

[12] Naipaul, 'Prologue', p. 15.
[13] J. Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 10.
[14] Ibid., pp. 21–2.
[15] J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 2–3.

myriad emotions of longing, melancholy, and anger, but it does not interrupt the structure of the quest, which gives Naipaul's essays an unfailingly narrative quality. These are essays with tiny *Bildungsromane* embedded within them. But while Naipaul's fiction goes on to correct the historical erasure of the Indo-Caribbean from literary representation, the most moving and honest admission of the realities of failure, impossibility, and erasure is articulated in his essays about the writing life: failure becomes a natural bridge of affinity between the fallible genre of the essay and postcolonial consciousness.[16]

Theorists of the form, notably György Lukács and Theodor Adorno, have pointed to the inherent hybridity and the indeterminacy of the essay, particularly as a form perpetually caught in a conflict between a scientific and an artistic vision of the world. The various forms of fallibility that have historically been identified in the genre of the essay – the tentative, the unfinished, the hybrid, and the imperfect – add up to a freedom from mastery that is resonant with what Edward Said considers, following Giambattista Vico, a model of flawed humanism.[17] They are also peculiarly conducive to the consciousness of the colonised, and they continue to resonate with aspirational narratives of decolonisation. The disorienting gulf between a colonially inherited knowledge-system and the visceral reality surrounding the postcolonial writer shapes a narrative of crisis and failure that finds a meaningful expression in the conflict inherent in the very genre of the essay. The irresolvable conflict of postcolonial literary selfhood yields a living narrative of creative failure.

Like his iconic novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the essays of Chinua Achebe articulate a traumatic origin story of this postcolonial inheritance. The novel tells the story of the violent eruption of modernity in a traditional community. The essays are a reflection on one of the most pervasive and inescapable sources of power working for this modernity – an English education. But even in the crafting of his essays, Achebe makes history a personal and intimate thing. In his essay 'African Literature as Restoration of Celebration' (1990), he memorably outlines the justifications the European coloniser provides in support of colonialism, because 'one thing is certain: You do not walk in, seize the land, the person, the history of another, and

[16] S. Majumdar, 'Essay and empire' in K. Wittman and E. Kindley (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Essay* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 167–81.

[17] E. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 11–12.

then sit back and compose hymns of praise in his honour'.[18] Elaborate excuses become necessary, such as the claim 'that the man you dispossessed is worthless and quite unfit to manage himself or his affairs'. To justify the looting of precious natural resources, 'you prove that he doesn't own them in the real sense of the word – that he and they just happened to be lying around the same place when you arrived'. The final denial might be of the very humanity of the colonised: 'If the worse should come to the worst, you may even be prepared to question whether such as he can be, like you, fully human.' A forgettable question is staged rhetorically: 'Were there people there?' The painful answer to the question contains the inevitable historical truth: 'Well . . . not really, you know . . . people of sorts, perhaps, but not as you and I understand the word.' The kind of narrative and dialogic flow that characterises Achebe's novel also shows up here, but rage and irony are both humanised and historicised far more directly in the essays.

How did this realisation come to Achebe? 'African Literature as Restoration of Celebration' outlines its origin with brutal honesty. The English literary evocations of Africa that he encountered as part of his colonial education made Africa 'an enigma' to him, he writes:

> I did not see myself as an African in those books. I took sides with the white men against the savages. In other words, I went through my first level of schooling thinking I was of the party of the white man in his hair-raising adventures and narrow escapes. The white man was good and reasonable and smart and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid, never anything higher than cunning. I hated their guts. But a time came when I reached the appropriate age and realized that these writers had pulled a fast one on me! I was not on Marlowe's boat steaming up the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*. I was one of those strange beings jumping up and down on the river bank, making horrid faces. Or, if I insisted on the boat ride, then I had to settle perhaps for that 'improved specimen', as Conrad sarcastically calls him, more absurd than a dog in a pair of breeches trying to make out the witchcraft behind the ship's water gauge.[19]

But if Achebe and Naipaul detect a common force behind the growth of writing by the colonised – the distortion, or worse, effacement of their reality by the coloniser – Achebe is canny enough to realise that a colonially imposed language or education enforces the European model of nationhood. In turn, the colonised embrace the English language on their own once they become

[18] C. Achebe, 'African literature as restoration of celebration', *Kunapipi*, 12:2 (1990), p. 4.
[19] Ibid., p. 7.

unconscious participants in this reality. 'It is simply not true', he writes in his essay 'Teaching *Things Fall Apart*' (1991), 'that the English forced us to learn their language.'[20] On the contrary, their policy showed a clear preference for native languages. 'The truth is', he argues in a personal voice with a deep historical burden, 'that we chose English not because the British desired it but because, having tacitly accepted the new nationalities into which colonialism had forced us, we needed its language to transact our business, including the business of overthrowing colonialism itself in the fullness of time.'[21] As the Christian church and capitalist institutions established themselves in sub-Saharan Africa, English became of increasing importance as a language of communication. And English education and Enlightenment thought have had a key role in anticolonial thought worldwide.

Language as Value

Some of the greatest insights in essays by postcolonial writers involve this unique confluence of the personal and the historical. The idiosyncrasy of the writer's personal voice is reinforced by a communal identity pushed to the margins by a complex range of historical forces.[22] The recovery of voice must invoke the subtle intersection of individual imagination and collective identity. This recuperation of voice, no matter how urgent, is always haunted by the possibility of failure and the absurdity of the very conditions that enable it. This bind also holds true for the white writer who lives behind a wall of exclusionary racial privilege, nowhere more painfully than in apartheid-era South Africa.

In tracing the ideological authority of racism and colonial domination, Nadine Gordimer finds a powerful ancestor to politics in morality. Particular forms of Calvinistic prudery, Gordimer argues, enabled the Dutch Reformed Church to twist 'religion to the service of racism and identified the church with the security of the state, including its sexual morality based on the supposed "purity" of one race'.[23] Myths freeze history into nature so that its ideological workings become invisible, as Roland Barthes has reminded us,

[20] C. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 94.
[21] Ibid.
[22] For an account of the relationship between the essay and history in India, see Priti Joshi's discussion in 'Grist for the mill: history and the essay in India, 1870–1920' in this volume (Ch. 31).
[23] N. Gordimer, *Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 5.

and morality provides powerful ammunition for defending racial and colonial violations enabled by politics, drawing on religion, invisibly and sometimes not so invisibly.

The consequences of this morally asserted racial superiority are far-reaching and best captured in the poetic prose of Gordimer's essays. 'Men are not born brothers', she writes in the essay '1959: What is Apartheid?' (1959), 'they have to discover each other, and it is this discovery that apartheid seeks to prevent.'[24] Often the scale of this tragedy becomes most appallingly clear through private stories from everyday life, which is where Gordimer's confessional essay takes on novelistic texture, foregrounding stories that are visible and tangible:

> How am I to remember that Danny, who is writing his Ph.D. thesis on industrial psychology, has never seen the inside of a museum? How am I to remember that John, who is a journalist on a lively newspaper, can never hope to see the film I am urging him not to miss, since the township cinemas are doubly censored and do not show what one might call adult films? How am I to remember that Alice's charming children, playing with my child's toy elephant, will never be able to ride on the elephant in the Johannesburg Zoo?[25]

What is even more painful than the daily, ubiquitous instances of exclusion and oppression is the way it becomes naturalised in the private and historical memory of people on both sides of the colour divide:

> Our children grow up accepting as part of natural phenomena that they are well-clothed and well-fed, while black children are ragged and skinny. It cannot occur to the white child that the black one has any rights outside of charity; you must explain to your child, if you have the mind to, that men have decided this, that the white shall have, and the black shall not, and it is not an immutable law, like the rising of the sun in the morning. Even then it is not possible entirely to counter with facts an emotional climate of privilege. We have the better part of everything; how difficult it is for us not to feel, somewhere secretly, that we *are* better?[26]

If Achebe and Naipaul reveal the radical imbalance and inequity that shaped the unlikely birth of the postcolonial essayist, Gordimer records the imbalances that lie at the other end of that balance. This is clear in the reception of non-Western literature, and in the tilted formation of literary

[24] N. Gordimer, '1959: What is apartheid?' in *Living in Hope and History*, p. 105.
[25] Ibid., p. 108. [26] Ibid., p. 111.

canons. In her 1994 Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, Gordimer devoted three lectures to Chinua Achebe, Amos Oz, and Naguib Mahfouz respectively, asserting that 'Mahfouz is not given his rightful place in contemporary world literature, is never mentioned in the company of such names as Umberto Eco, Günter Grass, etc., and certainly is not widely read even by those whom one considers well-read.'[27] Gordimer recalls that when the lectures were published, the book received a favourable review by Edward Said, who nonetheless 'chided' Gordimer on her notion that Mahfouz was 'neglected', or 'not recognized for his greatness in world literature'.[28]

Mahfouz, Said pointed out, was 'fully established in the canon of greatness' in Arabic culture, and, 'in the populist canon of fame, while controversial, is widely read'.[29] Gordimer's notion of Mahfouz's exclusion from a canon of world literature 'was in fact that of the Euro-North Americans into which only a few of us foreigners have been admitted'.[30] Someone as politically alert as Gordimer surely has a keen awareness of her own whiteness as she speaks of her place in the Western canon, and the fact that she writes in English; indeed, it takes someone of such a keen historical sensitivity to realise, as she did, that what she described as exclusion failed to take into account significance and popularity not visible to the realm that had become her default yardstick.

There is a stylistic ease and confidence in these mature essays by Gordimer that is missing, perhaps deliberately, in the essays representing yearning, confusion, and anger by Achebe and Naipaul. But an abiding political conscience repeatedly impels Gordimer to see through its foundation on the privilege of race and education, and to launch a reflexive inquiry into this privilege that comes into existence by excluding others. The force of this critique is altogether different when it comes from someone who might suffer these exclusions herself. For if Gordimer's essays combine an understanding of the theology of apartheid with a painful, novelistic chronicling of its quotidian horrors, the essays of Zoë Wicomb establish the latter as what Andrew van der Vlies has called a 'postapartheid' voice.[31]

This is not so much a true as a factual description (Wicomb was born in South Africa in 1948, the year apartheid was formally instituted), as in the

[27] N. Gordimer, 'The status of the writer in the world today: which world: whose world?' in *Living in Hope and History*, p. 17.
[28] Ibid., pp. 17–18. [29] Ibid., p. 18. [30] Ibid.
[31] A. van der Vlies, Introduction to Z. Wicomb, *Race, Nation, Translation: South African Essays, 1990–2013*, ed. Van der Vlies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 5.

larger historical sense that she is able to reveal the hegemonies of anti-apartheid movements, and the exclusions they enact. Carol Sicherman has called Wicomb a 'post-protest writer', one 'committed to democratic ideals but refusing a single ideological stance'.[32] Wicomb combines the idiosyncrasy of her private imagination with her striated identity as a mixed-race woman to point to the limits of Black nationalism – its strident masculinism and its inability, sometimes, to look beyond the Black–white binary. In his introduction to Wicomb's 2018 collection of essays, *Race, Nation, Translation*, Van der Vlies praises Wicomb for this, referring to Edward Said's caveat against the orthodoxies of subaltern nationalism, calling it the role of the intellectual and the writer 'to present "a kind of countermemory with its own counterdiscourse" to defend against the rise of new orthodoxies'.[33]

Wicomb's questioning of hegemonic national cultures energises much of her fiction, but in an important essay, 'Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture' (1991), she lays down clear terms through which to articulate scepticism of the idea of a national culture, as 'the meanings of the term "nation" and "culture" are transformed when they are welded together to form the popular phrase "national culture"'.[34] Language devours history, and memories are lost. She writes:

> The pluralism implicit in the separate terms – where nation refers to a whole country and culture to the way we live as well as all our diverse forms of expression – is lost as hegemony creeps into the meaning of the combined form. From the rhetoric of the liberation movement we gather that a national culture never simply exists; it is always something that has to be forged, a process, something in the making.[35]

As the process of the making is suppressed, national culture starts to appear as a natural and organic entity – or at least it begins to bear the burden of appearing natural. But the culture of marginal groups never goes through this process of cementation, for obvious reasons:

> It is interesting to note that terms like women's culture and black culture never become bonded in this way, precisely because in a white patriarchal society such cultures can never be hegemonic. The adjectival function of

[32] C. Sicherman, 'Literary afterword' in Z. Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2000), p. 197.
[33] Van der Vlies, Introduction to Wicomb, *Race, Nation, Translation*, p. 5.
[34] Z. Wicomb, 'Tracing the path from national to official culture' in *Race, Nation, Translation*, p. 43.
[35] Ibid., pp. 43–4.

> *woman* or *black* is retained, but *national* becomes in a sense nominalized, to assert that the cultural form in question is naturally welded to the nation.[36]

For Wicomb, there is nothing natural about the formation of national culture. It is an entity forged primarily for export – the image in which a nation wishes to present itself in the eyes of the world. Wicomb outlines this through an evocative satire:

> If we press the relation between cultural production and market economy, we arrive at something like Outspan, the name for South African oranges not eaten at home (where children die of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency), but rather packaged for foreign consumption. However, we know that Outspan oranges are chosen for their size, color, uniformity, and wholesomeness. That qualifying criteria are not discussed seems to be inherent in the fixed syntagm of national culture. Which practices, for instance, are excluded, and why?[37]

Implicit or explicit hierarchies of different kinds of group identity arise from the unity or stability they appear to possess, and how diffuse certain others appear. Now linguistically codified, these notions of unity or diffusion, Wicomb argues, have no real historical foundation. 'Nation and ethnicity', she writes, 'are always cast in hierarchical terms – nation as developed, and of the privileged category of unity, while ethnicity is seen as primitive, belonging to a different mentality, made up of opinion, custom, prejudice, forms of knowledge that are not valued.'[38] This recalls what we noted Achebe as saying above: that nationalities were group identities imposed on the various peoples of Africa, which in turn necessitated the adaptation of English language and education. Language and reality shape each other ceaselessly, and yet it takes imaginative writers like Achebe and Wicomb to see their constant mutual entanglement and the consequent shaping of what we erroneously accept as natural.

Wicomb puts into practice the suspicion felt by Naipaul and Achebe about the powerful ideological work done by the English language. Instead of accepting the terms 'nation' or 'culture' at face value, she writes, 'if both were recognized as pragmatic concepts that find legitimation in particular sets of practices, particular political needs, we might find their conflicting demands easier to negotiate'.[39] It is important, she argues, to recognise the

[36] Ibid., p. 44. [37] Ibid.
[38] Z. Wicomb, 'Nation, race, and ethnicity: beyond the legacy of victims' in *Race, Nation, Translation*, p. 57.
[39] Ibid.

dialectical relation between the two, just as it is crucial to 'reflect on the common root of the words "dialect" and "dialectic," which relates to discourse'.[40]

The Essay as a Transient Moment

The unique and unpredictable relation between the personal and the historical that shapes the texture of the postcolonial essayism also becomes the site of politics for the Indian writer Shashi Deshpande. Roughly contemporaneous to Wicomb, this prolific Indian writer of novels, essays, and a recent memoir is highly acclaimed in India but has received scant recognition outside her country. Several complex reasons lie behind this anomaly, ranging from Western feminists' inability to read the unique, indigenous strain of feminism running through Deshpande's fiction, to a certain simplicity of style and a bare honesty of voice that has run counter to the flamboyance of idiom and narrative that has often been seen as synonymous with the postcolonial literary voice following Salman Rushdie and other national allegorists.

In her recent collection of essays, *Subversions* (2021), Deshpande recalls a comment by the influential poet and publisher P. Lal on her early work. While sharing the news that he would publish Deshpande's stories in a collection that was to become her first book, Lal wrote that he was taken by their 'artless fluency and human nuances'.[41] Lal's description says much about Deshpande's writing; moreover, it goes a long way towards explaining why this prolific writer and winner of numerous national literary awards is nevertheless often excluded from a certain canon of literary artistry, not only outside India, but sometimes within the country as well. While Deshpande rejects the strident clamour of mainstream politics, she also remains distant from the interiority and stillness of experimental aesthetics, and it is probably the latter that leads to her exclusion from what may be the most important recent collection of Indian essays in English, *The Book of Indian Essays* (2020), edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, which defines the essay primarily as a poetic genre, one that captures the momentary, unrepeatable encounter.

Away from the noise and bustle of public sphere politics, Deshpande's writing resides in homespun layers of the quotidian, but without the bold

[40] Ibid.

[41] S. Deshpande, 'On Professor P. Lal' in *Subversions: Essays on Life and Literature*, ed. N.E. Batty and D. Riemenschneider (Chennai: Context, 2021), p. 278.

brush strokes of obvious aesthetic intent. While it makes her invisible according to many parameters, it creates a unique blend of aesthetics and politics that she foregrounds clearly in her essays, such as when she invokes the alliance of Nadine Gordimer, whose work is so closely connected with apartheid. She writes, 'politics influences my work only as it influences the lives of people'.[42] Gordimer's statement can also be read as a powerful credo for Deshpande's writing; the politics, especially that of women's lives, is both intense and submerged. Human lives that make up this fiction remain intimate testimonies of the nature and texture of history even though larger historical events are almost never mentioned – not even in the way, say, the Black Consciousness movement, or the 1966 assassination of the Afrikaner prime minister Henrik Verwoerd shapes Wicomb's otherwise resolutely private fiction.

In the essay 'Catching the Truth of the Nation', Deshpande returns to a canonised male novelist whose deeply historical evocation of political conflict is entrenched in the history of literature, questioning, much like Wicomb, the constructed nature of the idea of 'nation':

> The nation is an abstraction and it is only through the reality of human lives that you can approach that idea. Even *War and Peace*, that epic novel about Russia, speaks through the lives of people ... [T]hroughout the novel, speaking directly to the reader in his author's voice, Tolstoy is openly critical of the historian's method of taking only the events and the principal actors. He talks instead of using an 'infinitesimally small unit' for understanding – the ordinary individual, the family. And it is through the lives of a few families that Tolstoy has given us a picture of the chaotic, shifting and tumultuous state of the nation at that time.[43]

Rooted as she is in an intensely vernacular and social reality, Deshpande is just as vigilant against what she considers deceptions enacted by religion – for instance, through Hindu symbolism of feminine power and energy:

> I have always had a deep mistrust of the idea of Shakti. I have considered it a sop thrown at women to give them the illusion of power, the dust thrown up to conceal the complete control of their lives by others. At the other end of this idea of the Trishul-wielding goddess is the reality of most women's lives, lives in which strength turns into endurance, into a struggle for sheer survival. Between these two extremes is a long line on which most women

[42] S. Deshpande, 'The writer as activist' in *Subversions*, p. 8.
[43] S. Deshpande, 'Catching the truth of the nation' in *Subversions*, p. 20.

> stand, women who need something very different from this extraordinary strength – which may never be theirs – and this constant struggle to survive.[44]

In her essays Deshpande is a teacher and an explicator, but one of unusual honesty and candour, in that she is equally at ease drawing on her own life and experiences as when referring to literary works. Invoking a vibrant literary tradition that goes back at least to Jane Austen, she argues that it is deeply 'ironic that while the family and the home have, in the abstract, a huge importance in human life, literature connected to the family or to the home becomes minor'.[45] Probing this paradox, she concludes that the sole reason behind this treatment of domestic fiction is the inevitable association of family – its 'fatal conjunction' – with women: 'Anything connected with women becomes minor.'[46] How else to explain the minoritisation of 'the place where we learn about life, about living with others, it is where we learn about love and jealousy and hostility, about how humans can support one another and how they can destroy one another'?[47]

If some of the most interesting essayists from postcolonial India are those who fight the complex inequities of historicism, the aesthetic burdens that arise from such inequities have been the consistent preoccupation of the intricate essays of Amit Chaudhuri. Following the sharply interventionist collection, *Clearing a Space* (2008), two of Chaudhuri's more recent collections, *Telling Tales* (2013) and *The Origins of Dislike* (2018), chart fascinating trajectories for the postcolonial essay, offering the manifesto of a delicate but polemical sensibility. A deeply modernist voice that echoes T.S. Eliot no less than D.H. Lawrence (on whom Chaudhuri has written extensively), Chaudhuri argues against the differentiated 'sources of validation or control – the heart for poetry, the brain for thought', which will disrupt a certain historicism of thought as well as 'embody a process in which the difference between thinking and poetry ceases to be a dependable one'.[48] Once this disassociation of sensibility is voided, one of the most significant outcomes is the aesthetic of the genre of the essay:

> The essay, then, is not the product of a 'separate' consciousness. My remark was my way of suggesting that the essay requires one to be 'wholly attending'.

[44] S. Deshpande, 'Is Shakti woman power?' in *Subversions*, pp. 75–6.
[45] S. Deshpande, 'Locating the novel' in *Subversions*, p. 186.
[46] Ibid., p. 181.
[47] Ibid., p. 186.
[48] A. Chaudhuri, Introduction to *The Origins of Dislike* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 6.

> Just as Eliot uses, when speaking of poetry, corporeal metaphors for rethinking 'tradition' – the digestive tract, nerve-patterns – I believe that (since writers can't take their cultural identity for granted) a disparate series of acts leading up to, and described in, the essay – going for a walk, listening to music, responding to the political – gesture towards a desire for a new vocabulary or mapping for how we inherit, inhabit, and shape culture. The essay is not a venue in which the itineraries we've already been handed down will do.[49]

Such a fusion of sensibility, for Chaudhuri, has far-reaching implications for how disciplinary ways of thinking are shaped in postcolonial India. 'In this', he writes, 'we are children of the European Renaissance – research verifies and reproduces reality; "thinking" is an imponderable, and in some ways closer to the "imagination".'[50] The separation of thinking and research, beyond creating an implicit hierarchy between literature and social sciences, imports that very hierarchy into literature itself, valorising the referential function of the novel over all else.

The instrumental deployment of literature in postcolonial India is of course also part of a larger phenomenon in the anglophone world – the canonisation of writers 'because some aspect of their writing has been translated advantageously into a set of terms important to particular literary-historical moments'.[51] Chaudhuri's examples include Virginia Woolf's importance to the feminist movement, Jean Rhys's annexure by postcolonial studies, and James Joyce's verbal play making him indispensable both to modernist and hermeneutic studies. Literary activism, Chaudhuri's name for the series of interventions he has organised as an ongoing critique of the marginalisation of literature in academia, as well as in the publishing marketplace, has repeatedly drawn attention to the various ways the idea and the reality of 'important events' have colonised literary spaces. With a larger public world of incessant newsiness in the backdrop, the smaller world of ideas easily gets dominated by the instrumental visibility of research:

> Knowing is shored up in India by the Hegelian distaste for ambiguity on the part of our academics and intellectuals; by the talismanic value given to archives, research, fieldwork, and information in our history-writing and fiction-writing; by the newspaper reports and issues that comprise our Manichean national life, where we're constantly aware of being on one side or the other.[52]

[49] Ibid., p. 7. [50] A. Chaudhuri, 'The origins of dislike' in *Origins of Dislike*, p. 29.
[51] A. Chaudhuri, 'The other Green' in *Origins of Dislike*, p. 93.
[52] A. Chaudhuri, 'The sideways movement' in *Origins of Dislike*, p. 192.

The contemporary postcolonial essayist, while fighting a different current of historicist thought than that which had occupied writers like Naipaul and Achebe, nevertheless falls back on similar bursts of disruption, mischief, and failure. This, for Chaudhuri, is an invocation of Barthes: 'The tone of fictionality is not ironical; that is, it isn't saying, "The opposite of what I'm saying is actually true." It's disruptive. It allows the critic to become fiction-writer, and say what it isn't possible to in academic writing.'[53] It is in this spirit that the postcolonial essayist is able to intervene in some of the defining debates in academia today without imbibing its dominant discourse or values.

[53] A. Chaudhuri, 'Possible, not alternative histories: a literary history emerging from sunlight' in *Origins of Dislike*, p. 257.

42

Performance and the Irish Essay

PAIGE REYNOLDS

One commonplace in studies of the essay is an acknowledgement of its capaciousness, a nod to the elements of the genre that are indefinable, flexible, and ever-changing, and the same might be said of the term 'Irish'. The latter might announce where an essayist was born or resides, temporarily or permanently, or designate an essay that turns its attention to Irish matters. Irish can denote essays written in English as well as in Irish, and following partition in 1921, when the island was divided into two political entities, it has been used to describe writing from southern Ireland (the Free State or Republic) as well as from Northern Ireland. Putting together two such commodious terms generates an enormous and eclectic compendium of work by writers from Bishop Berkeley to Marian Keyes, examples that in themselves suggest the eclecticism of a genre under whose umbrella we find the political, personal, natural, medical, linguistic, polemical, theoretical, academic, humorous, aesthetic, and literary.

There are, nonetheless, certain motifs that appear across the Irish essay – among them an alertness to the features of personal and communal identity, a sense of outreach and advocacy, and an engaging style in tune with the culture's oral tradition. Many essays offer strategic depictions of the distinctive contours of Irish experience calculated to resonate with readers beyond the island. Such features can be explained through the form's fascinating relationship with live and embodied performance. What the Irish writer Brian Dillon describes as 'essayism' – the 'tentative or provisional' nature of the form, as well as its 'attitude . . . its spirit of adventure and its unfinished nature' – can be understood, in the Irish essay, as a reflection of the culture's rich tradition of oral and theatrical performance.[1] Even today, the fingerprints of the bard who would create and perform verse for the ancient court,

[1] B. Dillon, *Essayism: On Form, Feeling, and Nonfiction* (New York: New York Review Books, 2018), pp. 15, 21.

or the *seanchaí* who has long shared traditional tales with listeners, can be found throughout the Irish essay.

Frequently imbricated with theatre and public lectures, live events that underscore the performative qualities of the form, the Irish essay often gears its impressions and inquiries self-consciously to audiences real and imagined. This helps to explain why many Irish writers appear confident that the essay plays a meaningful role in public dialogue. Across centuries and continents, writers have captured impressions and insights triggered by socio-political transformations and embraced the essay's malleability to puzzle out the contours of Irish identity, often highlighting its deliberate performativity. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, the flourishing of personal and lyric essays focused on rapidly changing perceptions of bodies, with many offering keen attention to sexuality, provides one salient example of this trait. The Irish essay's association with performance, which implies (or perhaps even requires) an audience, also helps to explain its ready adaptation to new forms, new technologies, and new platforms in pursuit of readers, listeners, and viewers at home and abroad.

The Irish Essay as Public Performance

Eimear McBride's collection *Something Out of Place: Women and Disgust* (2021), which examines the insidiousness and intransigency of misogyny, opens by asserting: 'This is simply an essay, a collection of thoughts, not an objective work of academic research, and so, by its very nature, subjective. Where there are gaps in nuance and knowledge, I hope others will fill them in and push the parameters of the debate further.'[2] Such ease with the essay's autoschediasm, its improvisational quality, I would argue, stems in part from the form's long association with Irish culture's variegated performance traditions. McBride, who studied acting at Drama Centre London, notes here qualities of the written essay that resonate with those of embodied performance. Her term 'debate' refers to an interaction typically understood as oral rather than textual, and points to a larger understanding of the essay as part of an ongoing dialogue about changing historical conditions in Ireland and abroad.

An early example of such dialogue appears in the enduring influence of Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). In this group of

[2] E. McBride, *Something Out of Place: Women and Disgust* (London: Profile, 2022), p. 4.

essays, derived from lectures the English poet and critic delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, Arnold identifies a powerful Celtic influence on English literature and culture, even as he recapitulates the flattening stereotypes and dialectical thinking often used to justify imperial rule by posing the 'sentimental' Celt against the 'prosaic, practical Saxon'.[3] He demonstrates the capacity of the essay to initiate and stoke conversations that span not only national boundaries, but also centuries. Arnold's observations have been taken up in considerations of national identity, aesthetics, and colonialism by Irish essayists from W.B. Yeats in 'The Celtic Element in Literature' (1897) and D.P. Moran in 'The Battle of Two Civilizations' (1900), to Seamus Deane in 'Arnold, Burke, and the Celts' (1985), the latter examining the influence of another Irish essayist, the philosopher Edmund Burke, on Arnold's notions of culture.[4]

As the afterlife of Arnold's collection suggests, one overarching concern of the Irish essay is identity, both individual and collective. The genre's long history confirms that identity is not merely a trope poached from late twentieth-century postcolonial theory, but a living question for many Irish essayists, one frequently filtered through an attention to performance. George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, both Irish playwrights living in Victorian England, produced a rich corpus of essays marked by deliberate self-fashioning. Across his political essays, Shaw mined the theatre for conceptual tools, perhaps most famously in 'The Quintessence of Ibsenism' (1891), which scrutinised the Norwegian dramatist's iconoclastic characters to illuminate the failures of British society. In 'The Truth of Masks' (1891), Wilde turned his attention to Shakespearean productions, closely analysing performance and stagecraft to tease out the complexities of theatrical illusion. Here, Wilde welcomes anachronism, citing the casting of Juliet as a woman and the use of 'changeable scenery', and announces that 'a great work of dramatic art . . . should be presented to us in the form most suitable to the modern spirit'.[5] Wilde's account of the adaptive capabilities of theatre trickles into his understanding of the essay as provisional. He concludes, 'The essay simply represents an artistic standpoint, and in aesthetic criticism

[3] M. Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder, 1867), pp. 102, 11.

[4] W.B. Yeats, 'The Celtic element in literature' in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier, 1961), pp. 173–88; D.P. Moran, 'The battle of two civilizations' in *Ideals in Ireland*, ed. I. A. Gregory (London: Unicorn, 1901), pp. 25–44; S. Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880–1980* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), pp. 17–27.

[5] O. Wilde, 'The truth of masks' in *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. L. Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 297.

attitude is everything. For in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true.'[6]

Across the Irish Sea, the cultural revivalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries endeavoured to resurrect and revivify Irish language, folklore, history, sport, and aesthetics largely to stoke a public investment in nationalism. During these decades, a surfeit of essays imagined a new Irish nation, and many understood national identity as a cultivated role to be staged before audiences local and global. Douglas Hyde's influential 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation' (1892) argued that de-anglicisation should be regarded 'not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English'.[7] In an essay derived from her lecture 'Women, Ideals, and the Nation' (1909), Constance de Markievicz urged women to take their place in public life in order to 'make the world look upon you as citizens first, as women after'.[8] As for Hyde, Irishness for Markievicz must manifest in cultivated public performances abetted by indigenous costume, props, and setting. She advocates the importance to national self-understanding of purchasing and displaying native goods when she asks women to 'make it the fashion to dress in Irish clothes, feed on Irish food – in this as in everything, LIVE REALLY IRISH LIVES'.[9]

Performance was embedded in the critique not only of imperialism, but also of entrenched notions of class, gender, and sexuality. Maria Edgeworth's first published work, 'An Essay on The Noble Science of Self-Justification' (1795), is filled with the didacticism of *Practical Education* (1798), an educational treatise she co-authored with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth. The essay instructs women on how to manage their husbands, and opens by asserting, 'Obtain power, then, by all means: power is the law of man; make it yours.'[10] Strikingly, opinion not reason, for Edgeworth, is the way forward: 'This mode of opposing authority to argument, and assertion to proof, is of such universal utility, that I pray you to practise it.'[11] Her satirical essay

[6] Ibid., p. 304.
[7] D. Hyde, 'The necessity for de-anglicising the Irish nation' in *The Revival of Irish Literature: Addresses by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, KCMG, Dr George Sigerson, and Dr Douglas Hyde* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), p. 117.
[8] C. de Markievicz, *A Call to the Women of Ireland* (Dublin: F. O'Connor, 1918), p. 12.
[9] Ibid., p. 11.
[10] M. Edgeworth, 'An essay on the noble science of self-justification' in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, ed. C. Connolly (London: J.M. Dent, 1994), p. 64.
[11] Ibid., p. 66.

exposes the twisted rhetorical and performative tools married women must use to assert their authority in a culture that awards them few other means. Like several of the Irish essayists cited in the present chapter, Edgeworth was a dramatist, though the type of performance she advocates in this essay unfurls not on the stage, but in the domestic sphere. It would, for example, inflect her characterisation of the Irish servant Thady from her novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800), who applies the essay's lessons to unsettle the social and economic authority of his Anglo-Irish masters.

Such writers use performance as a metaphor to lodge trenchant social critique, but strikingly, many influential Irish essays have been produced in association with actual theatrical institutions. Those associated with the Irish Literary Theatre, which collapsed in 1901, and the Irish National Theatre Society and Abbey Theatre that followed, included George Moore, Edward Martyn, Lady Augusta Gregory, J.M. Synge, and Yeats, among others. In various essays, some of which were published in little magazines sponsored by these theatres, these writers advocated different perspectives on the relationship between art and politics.[12] Critics outside of their companies sometimes resisted their brand of cultural nationalism; James Joyce's essay 'The Day of the Rabblement' (1901) lambasted the Irish Literary Theatre for shying away from controversial European drama. Others employed the essay to tease out the themes of their dramatic works, with Gregory and Synge detailing the nuances of rural life in western Ireland for anglophone readers.

This understanding of the essay as part of an ongoing colloquy, one in which artists and intellectuals might explore and imagine solutions to complex social and cultural problems, runs steadily across the centuries, and across the border after partition. So too does the association of such conversations with theatre and performance. During the turmoil of the Troubles, the violent sectarian conflict unfolding across the latter decades of the twentieth century, the Field Day collective was founded in 1980 as 'a cultural and intellectual response to the political crisis in Northern Ireland'.[13] Based in Derry, Field Day had its origins in the theatre: the playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea intended to generate new audiences for Irish theatre by staging plays including Friel's *Translations* (1980) and Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990). Field Day also developed a publishing arm that

[12] See P. Reynolds, 'Reading publics, theatre audiences, and the little magazines of the Abbey Theatre', *New Hibernia Review*, 7:4 (Winter 2003), 63–84.

[13] 'Field Day: A brief history', *Field Day*, https://fieldday.ie/about/ (accessed 31 July 2023). See also A. O'Malley, *Field Day and the Translation of Irish Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

endeavoured to stimulate and recalibrate perceptions of national identity. The Field Day Pamphlets (1983–8), edited by Seamus Deane, were early and influential postcolonial interrogations written by critics including Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. Other essays appeared later in the series Critical Conditions (1996–2005). They ranged across literary and cultural criticism and often explored the role that culture might play in enabling political and social cohesion, as well as in renovating rigid understandings of Irishness. This helps to explain Field Day's resistance to attempts to fold Irish writing into the rubric of English literature, a cultural intervention made manifest in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1990), three volumes whose dramatic neglect of women writers stoked a vigorous conversation about gender bias in the Irish literary field and prompted the publication, in 2002, of two additional volumes focused on women's writing.[14]

Essays derived from the public lecture also carry the residue of the provisional, improvisatory, and responsive qualities of live performance, as seen in Seamus Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry* (1990) and Paul Muldoon's *To Ireland, I* (2000), both built from lectures the poets delivered at Oxford. These collections focus largely on retrospective readings of literary classics, while the laureate essays of Anne Enright display the form's reactive capabilities and point to the future. When she served as the inaugural Laureate for Irish Fiction (2015–18), Enright published in *The London Review of Books* her lectures re-examining male authority in the wake of her father's recent death, her analysis of the #MeToo movement, and her response to the 2016 American presidential election of Donald Trump. In one essay on the Irish literary landscape, she lists ways that women have been precluded from that tradition, including one all-male 'Irish Writers' poster targeted at tourists. However, she closes by commending recent debuts by Irish women, highlighting the writer's public role: 'I hope we will finally sit side by side – in the newspapers, on the stage, up on the damn poster – men and women together.'[15]

Impressions and Interrogations

Interrogations of gender and sexuality appear throughout recent essays scrutinising the body and embodied experience in contemporary Ireland.

[14] See M. Kelleher, '*The Field Day Anthology* and Irish women's literary studies', *Irish Review*, 30 (2003), 82–94.

[15] A. Enright, *No Authority: Writings from the Laureateship* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2019), p. 87.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of these regard identity as performative. The 'impression' – borrowed here from the title of Elizabeth Bowen's first collection, *Collected Impressions* (1950) – provides a useful conceptual mechanism to consider such essays. First, the impression as an ephemeral insight or glimpse underscores the immediate nature of the essay, its quest to document contemporary conditions, as seen in Bowen's essayistic accounts of the First and Second World War.[16] This quality makes the essay particularly suitable for representing recently and rapidly changing perceptions of gender and sexuality. Only across the past four decades, after centuries of legal and moral constraints on sexual matters in Ireland and Northern Ireland, has birth control become widely available, homosexuality decriminalised, divorce signed into law, and abortion and same-sex marriage permitted. Meanwhile, revelations of shocking sexual scandals and abuses enabled by church and state have come to public notice, leading many to spurn the secrets and silences surrounding sexual matters.[17]

These dramatic legal and cultural transformations help to explain what appears to be a new candour regarding sexuality and the body in the twenty-first-century essay. However, such openness towards the body and sexuality stems from a much longer oral and performative tradition. In her essay 'Why I Choose to Write in Irish, the Corpse that Sits Up and Talks Back' (1995), the poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill offers a spirited defence of Irish-language literature and explains what this rich and varied tradition uniquely grants writers. She asserts, for instance, that

> the attitude to the body enshrined in Irish remains extremely open and uncoy. It is almost impossible to be 'rude' or 'vulgar' in Irish. The body, with its orifices and excretions, is not treated in a prudish manner, but is accepted as *an nádúir*, or nature, and becomes a source of repartee and laughter rather than anything to be ashamed of.[18]

The garrulous and audacious corpse and the oral tradition to which this symbol alludes offer one logic for why influential essays on bodily experiences once forbidden or disparaged have appeared in performance. The 2014 'Noble Call' speech by drag artist and gay activist Panti Bliss (Rory O'Neill)

[16] A. Hepburn, Introduction to *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 1–23.

[17] See D. Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2010).

[18] N. Ní Dhomhnaill, 'Why I choose to write in Irish, the corpse that sits up and talks back' in *Selected Essays*, ed. O. Frawley (Dublin: New Island, 2005), p. 18.

and the academic Susan Cahill's 2016 account of her 'not remotely traumatic' abortion, were delivered before live audiences at the Abbey Theatre and subsequently disseminated in print and online.[19] These essay-addresses abetted, respectively, the passage of the Marriage Equality Referendum in 2015 and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution, which effectively banned abortion, in 2018. Other essayistic explorations of gender, sexuality, and the body have appeared in print, but there is an easy line to be traced between the essay and performance: Sally Rooney's assessment of abortion carries the argumentative energies of her experience as an award-winning university debater, while Megan Nolan's essays reflect the wry humour of her 'David Sedaris-esque' performances at Dublin comedy nights, which she claims stoked her interest in writing essays.[20]

The impression reflects the improvisational nature of essayistic form, which allows it to capture experiences, ideas, and feelings not fully metabolised, but an impression also can denote an imitation, a performative act that mimics preceding behaviour. Bowen's essay 'The Mulberry Tree' (1934) recounts the restrictive rules of her schooldays, which rendered the 'ever difficult business of getting oneself across' as 'the most pressing of all at this age', exacerbating the self-consciously performative conduct of her young Irish peers: 'Foibles, mannerisms we therefore exaggerated most diligently.'[21] Such behaviour may be characteristic of adolescent development, but was exacerbated in Ireland by colonial and national imperatives, which often required citizens to define themselves through the public embrace or rejection of political and ecclesiastical orthodoxies.

The imitative impression also accords with Judith Butler's early theories of performativity and Homi Bhabha's understanding of mimicry as the exaggerated imitations of colonised peoples. Spun through the socio-cultural transformations of the twenty-first century, these concepts suffuse Kevin Breathnach's collection *Tunnel Vision* (2019). His title provides a provocative metaphor, one slyly sexual that also reflects his lyric essay's insistent focus on individual experience. The title essay, 'Tunnel Vision', documents a seven-hour train journey across Norway, analyses the avant-garde film *Train Ride*

[19] R. O'Neill (Panti Bliss), 'Panti's noble call at the Abbey Theatre', YouTube (2 February 2014), www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXayhUzWnlo; S. Cahill, 'My abortion was not remotely traumatic', *Irish Times* (21 February 2016), www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/susan-cahill-my-abortion-was-not-remotely-traumatic-i-have-no-regrets-1.2542740 (both accessed 31 July 2023).

[20] S. Rooney, 'An Irish problem', *London Review of Books*, 40:10 (24 May 2018); A. O'Connor, 'Megan Nolan: "Dublin wasn't ever good for me"', *Irish Times* (20 February 2021).

[21] E. Bowen, 'The mulberry tree' in *Collected Impressions* (New York: Knopf, 1950), p. 186.

Bergen to Oslo directed by Thomas Hellum (2009), and recounts incidents of Breathnach's masturbation and mephedrone use in his Dublin flat. In this essay, the ideas of performance and audience suffuse his private erotic life, as when he hallucinates that a 'face appeared to be watching me' during intercourse, or recalls how he 'improvised a way of rehearsing intercourse' as an adolescent, or deliberately makes a 'nervous retreat' after confessing to a panicked cisgender male friend that he has had sex with a man.[22] Even as Breathnach defiantly complicates traditional notions of masculinity, he understands that political, racial, and economic histories adhere to his body, informing his behaviour as well as how others perceive him. He recounts his travels in Munich, Korea, Paris, and Madrid in part to suggest that they enable a kind of permissive liberation, both intellectual and embodied, but, as Julie Bates has observed, he maintains an 'attentiveness to the bad faith involved in performances of Irishness', as he and others 'navigate these settings with the ease and privilege of their fellow (white) Europeans'.[23]

Such legacies invite a third understanding of the impression, as a mark left by something, an imprint difficult to erase. In *Notes to Self* (2018), a pioneering collection published by Tramp Press, the writer and theatre scholar Emilie Pine ranges among topics from her father's alcoholism to gender bias in the academic workplace; in several essays, she recounts traumatic sexual experiences, including non-consensual encounters now understood as rape. In her essay 'Something about Me', she explains coming to understand in her early adolescence 'the effect of my body on others' as she 'copied the walks of the other girls' and 'smiled coyly' at boys as 'one way of being seen'.[24] These early performances help instantiate a damaging pattern lasting into adulthood of 'separation of body and self', in which she would 'witness, as if from a great distance, my own actions, accompanied by a relentlessly fault-finding commentary'.[25]

Pine's essays expose how a history of conservative attitudes and punitive practices in Ireland continue to shape self-perception, not least in relation to female desire. She describes an appointment at a family planning clinic, scheduled to obtain birth control when she was twenty years old, and recalls 'blushing every time [the nurse] talked about sexual pleasure, but this was life-changing information. Sex, it turns out, is meant to be – it is – fun.'[26]

[22] K. Breathnach, *Tunnel Vision* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), pp. 41, 50, 45.
[23] J. Bates, 'Essayism in contemporary Ireland' in P. Reynolds (ed.), *The New Irish Studies: Twenty-First-Century Critical Revisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 236.
[24] E. Pine, *Notes to Self* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2018), p. 128.
[25] Ibid., 145, 146.
[26] Ibid., p. 154.

Reflecting on her youth, Pine asserts: 'To own my body, my skin and nerve-endings, as a site of pleasure – my own, and not just someone else's – and to have *agency* has been a long transformation, and one that still feels radical.'[27] Her epiphany indicates a stubbornly enduring cultural history that denied the body, refused pleasure, covered up abuse, and relied on shame as a policing mechanism.

Recent essay collections focused tightly on motherhood provide another site to identify renovations in perceptions of the body and sexuality. In Ireland, as elsewhere, motherhood remains a live-wire political issue. Even today, the Irish Constitution defines women primarily by their maternal and domestic roles, and the pregnant body continues to be a site of political contest, as evident not only in the 'Repeal the Eighth' campaign, but also in debates surrounding a 2004 referendum that revoked a provision in the Constitution granting 'birthright citizenship'. Many such essays capture the uneven quality of social change that Irish women encounter in their daily lives. In *Constellations: Reflections from Life* (2019), Sinéad Gleeson recounts her life of bodily suffering, drawing details from childhood struggles with monoarticular arthritis and battles with leukemia as an adult. Gleeson reports her individual voice being discounted, as when she protested to a doctor puncturing her with a cast saw, but she also celebrates the collective activism of the Repeal movement: 'No matter what or how you write about the female body – from reproduction to sexuality, illness to motherhood – it is politicised. Women are reduced to the physical: to make it easier to disregard them. To decide, rule and legislate for them. But things are changing. The crowd has swelled; the voices are louder.'[28]

In *A Ghost in the Throat* (2020), the impressions of the poet Doireann Ní Ghríofa, like those of Pine (who describes her experience with infertility) and Gleeson (who recounts her daughter's premature birth), further reveal the thorny complexities of the vulnerable female body and the stickiness, even in the present day, of maternal ideals and expectations. In these essays, Ní Ghríofa toggles between personal memoir and readings of the eighteenth-century poem *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill. As she recounts her own years of pregnancy, nursing, and raising four young children, Ní Ghríofa cycles back to this poem in which a woman furiously mourns the death of her husband, 'inviting the voice of another woman to haunt my throat a while'.[29] Calling into question a national tradition that

[27] Ibid. [28] S. Gleeson, *Constellations: Reflections from Life* (London: Picador, 2019), p. 210.
[29] D. Ní Ghríofa, *A Ghost in the Throat* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2020), p. 10.

defines women as self-sacrificing wives and mothers, she nonetheless reveals how such legacies inhere in self-understanding: who is she, she wonders, without being pregnant or consumed with the daily routines of motherhood?

Other collections have further challenged limiting or reductive notions of Irishness that derive from how we read bodies in public. In Rosaleen McDonagh's *Unsettled* (2021), such concerns are refracted through her experience as a Traveller woman with a disability. Here again, the Irish essay imagines itself a device for simultaneously exposing the past and shaping the future; she insists that her revelatory personal essays are not the final word on the Traveller experience, but rather 'just one of many to come'.[30] Even as she documents the particular and often physical challenges she faces, McDonagh remains attentive to bodily gratifications, whether detailing her satisfying romantic and sexual encounters or the quotidian pleasure of fondling pods of Tide detergent. A playwright alert to the performative, she also keeps watch on the uneven social progress in Ireland. For example, she recognises her authority as a female university lecturer, and commends three of her young Traveller students who 'express their ethnicity in very flamboyant ways'.[31] But she weaves these observations with startling memories of her father being refused service at a local grocery store, stared down by fearful and hostile settlers.

As McDonagh notes, the personal essay has a pedagogical function: 'To write like a Traveller feminist means holding this space on the page, extending the paragraph, subtly explaining the nuances of simultaneous discrimination.'[32] Here, as in many recent essay collections, personal revelations are intended in part to educate readers about experiences that have long been silenced, hidden, or ignored. A similar impulse informs the work of the Irish-Nigerian writer Emma Dabiri, whose *Don't Touch My Hair* (2019) melds personal memoir with an array of sociological and historical scholarship to explore racism in Ireland and abroad. Organised by its attention to Black hair, this collection is a pastiche of personal memoir, images, and scholarship that tells a story of race and racism that is personal and societal, national and global, of its moment but tethered to complex histories. Deliberately polemical and didactic, Dabiri's second collection, *What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition* (2021), interrogates racism and white supremacy, laying out a series of propositions and provocations. A commitment to social intervention appears not least in the directives to readers that serve as essay

[30] R. McDonagh, *Unsettled* (Dublin: Skein Press, 2021), p. xiii.
[31] Ibid., p. 111.
[32] Ibid., p. xiv.

titles, among them 'Stop the Denial', 'Interrogate Whiteness', and 'Realize This Shit is Killing You Too'.

New Modalities of the Irish Essay

Brendan Barrington, the founder and editor of *The Dublin Review*, and an influential advocate of the essay form, has asserted that 'the essay in its various guises is every bit as much an art form as the short story or the poem, and ought to be treated as such'.[33] In recent decades, a robust assortment of little magazines supporting emerging writers has appeared in Ireland, among them *Banshee*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Irish Pages*, *Winter Papers*, and *Tolka*.[34] Strikingly, many of these are funded not only by subscription but also by the Arts Council of Ireland, which suggests a state commitment to the essay and its provocations. The adaptability and responsiveness of the essay, abetted by its expeditious publication in these periodicals, is enhanced further by digital platforms. As one example, the online literary magazine *Pendemic*, founded in Armagh to showcase writing in response to Covid-19, published Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan's essay 'Alone, in the Dark, With You' (2020), in which, amid quarantine lockdown, she laments the loss of the 'softness of velvet seats in the Abbey' and craves being 'alone in a theatre filled with other people'.[35] In addition to the stage, traditional and new media forms have drawn the attention of Irish writers to the essay, both as a literary symbol and as a practical tool to disseminate impressions and insights to wider audiences. The flexibility associated with the essay surfaces not only in subject and style, and in the venues that host it, but also in its relationship to its readership, its audiences.

Radio has also helped to disseminate the Irish essay. In the twentieth century, Bowen and Louis MacNeice wrote and presented essays for the BBC, just as Kate O'Brien and Seán Ó Faoláin had done for the Irish national broadcaster RTÉ. Today, the internet blog and podcast provide additional platforms for such work. On the BBC podcast 'The Essay', one can discover the poet Leontia Flynn or the novelist David Park sharing their thoughts on the arts in Northern Ireland since the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement,

[33] B. Barrington, 'Editor's note' in *The Dublin Review Reader*, ed. Barrington (Dublin: Dublin Review of Books, 2007), p. 2.

[34] For a more complete list, see *Contemporary Irish Writing: Books That Changed Us*, University College Dublin, https://contemporaryirishwriting.ie. (accessed 23 July 2023).

[35] C. Narayanan-Mohan, 'Alone, in the dark, with you', *Pendemic* (10 August 2020), http://pendemic.ie/alone-in-the-dark-with-you-by-chandrika-narayanan-mohan/ (accessed 23 July 2023).

and the novelist Glenn Patterson musing on Belfast's hairdressers.[36] Such formats, and the performances they host, not only sustain the venerable practices of an oral tradition, with its spoken transmission of attitudes and values, but also allow the essay to represent on a bigger stage, and to parse for a global audience, an increasingly heterogeneous understanding of Irish identity.

Essayists have likewise interrogated how media technologies such as film introduce to Ireland the world beyond its borders, for good and for ill. As early as the 1930s, as the Free State became more conservative and inward-looking, the playwright and novelist Mary Manning advocated cosmopolitanism through her review essays on international film written for the Gate Theatre's little magazine *Motley* (1932–4), which she edited.[37] The pages of *The Bell* (1940–54) were filled with discussions of film and radio, and their influence on post-independence Ireland. In one essay, Flann O'Brien bemoans that foreign films encouraged Dublin pub-goers to imitate the behaviours of actors like William Powell in *The Thin Man* (1934), and he derides these young people's 'flimsy' imitations of 'a flat two-dimensional picture-house ghost'.[38] In contemporary essays, international film represents less of a threat to national self-understanding; nonetheless, there arise in them points of interest suggestively consonant with the Irish past. The literary journal *gorse*, for example, published an online essay titled 'Provocation/Evocation' (2014) by Dylan Brennan, a poet who lives and works in Mexico, which re-examines the disruptive 1928 Paris premiere of the surrealist film *La Coquille et le Clergyman* directed by Germaine Dulac. When read as an 'Irish' essay, this piece evokes a long history of unruly audience conduct in Ireland, as seen in the theatrical reception of Seán O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926).

The idea of media as one step away from the real bodies that perform an action heightens the melancholy suffusing two recent collections centred on loss and memory. The lyric essays of Brian Dillon's *In the Dark Room* (2005) merge scholarly exegesis, photographs, and memoir to re-examine his loss at a young age of both parents. In them, he often focuses on photographs or voice recordings, material objects that promise to capture and concretise a past moment of bodily or oral presentation. These artefacts trigger

[36] BBC, 'The essay' (podcast), www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006x3hl (accessed 23 July 2023).
[37] R. van den Beuken, *Avant-Garde Nationalism at the Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928–1940* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021), pp. 63–70.
[38] See K. Matthews, *The Bell Magazine and the Representation of Irish Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), pp. 159.

memories, but often they only serve to underscore the limitations and failures of their medium: a snapshot of his father 'tells me nothing', a recording of his own voice erases any 'impression' of his father's voice echoed there in his own speech, another family photograph that includes his mother elicits the 'distinctly painful' 'feeling that she was manifestly present but just out of reach'.[39] Such technologies stoke memories and further cogitation, but they exacerbate the sense of loss by reminding the essayist that his parents are no longer alive and embodied.

In *Minor Monuments* (2019), Ian Maleney describes his attempts to capture the landscape of the Irish midlands through field recordings of natural sounds, only to realise that 'the effort was a failure'.[40] Nonetheless, he gestures to the long overlap between the audible and the essay by observing, 'Years ago, I thought that what I'm writing here would be best done through sound.'[41] While these recordings fail to capture the landscape, or the essence of his dying grandfather, Maleney frets about the essay as well, observing that 'this job of writing about one family in one place' has alienated him from his family and childhood home.[42] For Dillon and Maleney, a concern with authenticity – that familiar theme from early twentieth-century Irish essays – appears not in the lexicon of stage performance, but of photography and sound recording. Both writers use the personal essay to document the disconnect between the original (loved one) and the imitative (mechanically reproduced copy of that person's voice or image) to document the personal cost of such simulations.

Recent collections set in Derry have examined the repercussions of the Troubles and the immediate effects of Brexit by adeptly merging the impressions of the personal essay with a reassessment of political history. Darran Anderson's *Inventory: A Memoir* (2020) contains essays centred on objects associated with his coming of age in Northern Ireland, drawing particular notice to the significance of his family's economic precarity. In *Thin Places* (2021), Kerri Ní Dochartaigh's lyric essays turn to nature to parse the past, a tactic also characteristic of Tim Robinson's explorations of Connemara and the Aran Islands. Ní Dochartaigh attends to the stark realities of contemporary life in Northern Ireland, but reflects on 'thin places', the porous borders separating the fairy world and real world. In her detailed accounts of appalling events, such as her father briefly being taken hostage in his

[39] B. Dillon, *In the Dark Room* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2020), pp. 136, 265, 143.
[40] I. Maleney, *Minor Monuments* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2019), p. 118. [41] Ibid., p. 117.
[42] Ibid., p. 235.

'Video Van', the bombing of her childhood home, and the murder of a teenaged friend, she explains how she seeks consolation from memory, from places, from books, from the organic, as well as from Irish language and folklore traditions.

Ní Dochartaigh's conception of 'thin places' might be extrapolated to explain the porous relationship between different essayistic forms, as in the case of the photo-essay. In 2021, as Brexit took place and Covid restrictions fell, *The Guardian* published a 'photo essay' on the intergenerational trauma of the Troubles. Here again, the form of the essay adapts to changing circumstance, seeking to educate readers in the nuanced complexities of Irish culture. In excerpted interviews with nationalist and unionist teenagers, woven among photographs of Derry and Belfast, young adults show recognition that they live in 'a divided society', express an exasperation with 'the mutual hatred and violence of previous generations', and underscore their identity as increasingly porous and multifarious, rather than predicated on the binaries Arnold so famously identified in his essays of more than a century before.[43] In this photo-essay, as in others gathered on the web-based Troubles Archive funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, essayists juxtapose word and image to grapple with the past and to imagine the future, capturing impressions and insights triggered by socio-political transformations and parsing them for readers. This motility between print and performance, lexical and oral, text and body, visual and verbal, has long been a defining feature of the Irish essay, a form that has proven particularly responsive to contemporaneous issues, neoteric technologies, and evolving audiences.

[43] H.J. Hunter, 'Growing up in Northern Ireland free of the Troubles – a photo essay', *Guardian* (15 October 2021), www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/oct/15/growing-up-in-northern-ireland-free-of-the-troubles-a-photo-essay (accessed 31 July 2023).

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The Essay and the Public Intellectual

PETER MARKS

Edward Said defines the intellectual as 'an individual endowed with the faculty of representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public'.[1] Such people have a 'vocation', one that is 'publicly recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability. When I read Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell it is their specific, individual voice and presence that makes an impression on me over and above their arguments because they are speaking of their beliefs.'[2] Said's foregrounding of the individual voice echoes Michel de Montaigne's revolutionary proclamation, 'I myself am the subject of my book.'[3] Although the term 'intellectual' only appears in the early nineteenth century, Montaigne surely qualifies as an intellectual *avant la lettre*, whose inquisitiveness and erudition is expressed through an urbane personal style.[4] Montaigne fashioned the perfect rhetorical vehicle for intellectuals: one that articulates a focused message, an attitude, or a philosophy in an individual voice. Said's highlighting of risk, boldness, and vulnerability echoes Theodor Adorno's assessment of the essay as 'the critical form par excellence . . . . a critique of ideology'.[5] Said's heroic intellectual speaks 'truth to power',[6] and Adorno proposes a similar role for the essay, suggesting that it 'annul[s] theoretically outdated claims to completeness'.[7] This chapter argues that modern public intellectuals use the essay to profess their

The author wishes to thank Dr Ben Eldridge for his comments and suggestions, which materially improved this chapter.

[1] E. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 11. [2] Ibid., p. 13.
[3] M. de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987), p. lix.
[4] J. Frow, 'Intellectual' in T. Bennett, L. Grossberg, and M. Morris (eds.), *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Hoboken: J. Wiley & Sons, 2004), pp. 189–91.
[5] T. Adorno, 'The essay as form (1958)' in *Notes to Literature* (Combined Edition), ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. S.W. Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), p. 42.
[6] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, pp. 85–103. [7] Adorno, 'The essay as form', p. 40.

opinions on an infinite array of topics, encouraging the public into active dialogue with a form that seems, and sometimes is, productively incomplete.

Public intellectuals broadcast their views through newspaper columns, books, and lectures. Newspaper columns are restrictively brief, and though they do express personal views, they tend to consider transient concerns. Lectures rarely survive their performance, notable exceptions being those Virginia Woolf worked up into *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and, as we will see, ones Mary Beard published as *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (2017).[8] Whereas books generally aim for some form of explanatory completeness, the scholarly version striving to persuade through extended argument, the literary essay favours communication between writer and reader and its celebration of the subjective voice over a scholarly register foregrounds authenticity over authority. The form's brevity, moreover, allows public intellectuals to address a spectrum of interests, rather than a narrow zone of expertise, in their essays. That variety enables the public intellectual to deploy an assortment of tones and attitudes, from the polemical to the lyrical, the humorous to the impassioned, and beyond. Their essays showcase curiosity, flexible thinking, fluency of style, and attentiveness to audiences, qualities that allow them to communicate vigorously and imaginatively on almost any subject. And essay collections provide an afterlife, projecting individual essays beyond the temporal and geographical co-ordinates of their production and publication to new audiences. Any single collection may demonstrate the public intellectual's wide interests, their conceptual and expressive vitality, while making possible the dissemination of those ideas to new publics.

The cover of Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* strives for inclusivity: photographs of Mary McCarthy, James Baldwin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Noam Chomsky, Simone de Beauvoir, Malcolm X, and Virginia Woolf celebrate different genders, sexualities, races, and nationalities. Yet since only Woolf is British, this relative absence of British intellectuals might appear to justify Stefan Collini's observation that the word 'intellectual' 'irritates [British] people. They sense pretentiousness, arrogance.'[9] Implicit here is the notion that the figure of the 'French intellectual' (Sartre and De Beauvoir) or the 'New York intellectual' (McCarthy) needs neither explanation nor apology, while the British equivalent is a compromised figure. Woolf herself in

[8] See, however, Noam Reisner's 'The sermon and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 5), on religious models of the lecture that have been lasting.

[9] S. Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 2.

A Room of One's Own presents devastating takedowns of British (male) intellectuals, and a similar dismissiveness regularly energises George Orwell.[10] 'One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool' writes Orwell in his essay 'Notes on Nationalism' (1945).[11] As his publisher observes, 'the truth is [Orwell] is at one and the same time an extreme intellectual and a violent anti-intellectual'.[12] This chapter treats Orwell as the model British public intellectual, and argues that the generation of public intellectuals who follow him (Christopher Hitchens, Tony Judt, Tariq Ali, Mary Beard) adopt the Orwellian position of outsider, at odds with mainstream views. It shows how they carry on his attempt 'to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the society that they should strive after',[13] contributing to a rich and evolving essayistic ecosystem of ideas and opinions. Ultimately, it asks if the contemporary public intellectual still plays a vital role in a frenetic world of distractions.

George Orwell: The Anti-Intellectual Public Intellectual

Any analysis of Orwell as essayist and public intellectual must take into account the periodicals in which his essays first appeared, and which provided crucial sites for his growth as writer and thinker. Jürgen Habermas named the space opened up by the Enlightenment essay the 'public sphere', and essays published over the following centuries in newspapers, journals, magazines, and reviews presented opinions and assessments that massively enriched public debate.[14] In Orwell's case, all but twelve of his essays first appeared in periodicals. The little magazines, literary and political journals of his era, which had replaced the great reviews of the Victorian Age, are mostly long gone.[15] But Richard Rees, editor of the left-leaning journal *The Adelphi*, where Orwell's 'A Hanging' was published in August 1931, acknowledges their collective significance for Orwell's development as an essayist. Rees comments that *The Adelphi* 'helped give him a start', adding that Cyril

[10] Ibid., pp. 350–74.
[11] G. Orwell, 'Notes on nationalism' in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. P.H and S. Davison, and I. Angus, 20 vols. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), vol. 17, p. 154.
[12] V. Gollancz, Appendix to Orwell, *Complete Works*, vol. 5, pp. 221.
[13] See G. Orwell, 'Why I write' in *Complete Works*, vol. 18, pp. 316–21.
[14] J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
[15] *The New Statesman and Nation*, incorporated in 1931, remains a plucky outlier.

Connolly's *Horizon* 'helped establish [Orwell] among the best-known essayists of his day; *Partisan Review* made him known in America . . . [while] the brilliant but short-lived *Polemic* was to publish several of his later and more sombre politico-literary essays'.[16] *Horizon* published Orwell's investigations of popular culture such as 'Boys' Weeklies' and 'The Art of Donald McGill' in the early 1940s, while 'Notes on Nationalism' and 'Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool' appeared in *Polemic* later in the decade. Orwell's wartime 'London Letters' published in the *Partisan Review* were letters that read as essays, and they reintroduced him to American intellectuals, where his works had gone unpublished for half a decade.[17]

Rees is right to underscore the importance of these particular periodicals, but Orwell published essays in more than thirty journals and papers – some established and lauded, others fleeting and obscure. These organs collectively gave him access to numerous audiences with distinct interests and profiles. That proved a challenge but also a boon, allowing him freedom to write on an astonishing range of topics, from 'Shooting an Elephant' (*New Writing*) to 'W.B. Yeats' (*Horizon*), 'Reflections on Gandhi' (*Partisan Review*) to 'You and the Atom Bomb' (*Tribune*), 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad' (*Tribune*) to 'Bookshop Memories' (*Fortnightly*), to name a few examples. His development as public intellectual and an essayist was an interactive process, advanced in crucial ways by engagement with different editorial staffs and his awareness of discrete audiences. In a sense, he addressed not one public but a changing configuration of publics. The same applies to other public intellectuals, the cumulative cultural effect being incalculable.

Orwell pronounced his conscious effort to engage with audiences in 'Why I Write' (*Gangrel*): 'my starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice', and that 'there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing'.[18] As rhetorical tradition from the ancients advises, Orwell is speaking his beliefs by tactically tailoring his arguments to specific audiences. For *Horizon*'s more liberal, middle-class readers, for example, he might offer a literary or cultural analysis of a surprising topic from an acute angle. Thus 'Boys' Weeklies' (1940) confronts this audience with an unpatronising examination of lowbrow schoolboy papers. He develops a subtle, innovative

[16] R. Rees, *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), pp. 75–6.
[17] On the relation between letters and essays, see E.T. Bannet's 'Between public and private: letters, diaries, essays' in this volume (Ch. 8).
[18] Orwell, 'Why I write', p. 318.

reading of their history and impact, suggesting a need to counter the right-wing papers that dominate this zone of the public sphere. His essay 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad' (1946) challenged the left-wing readers of the Labour Party journal, *Tribune*, to overcome ideological unease with the natural world and recognise nature's liberating potential. He exhorted those readers to deny 'the doctrine that nothing is to be admired except concrete and steel', for otherwise, 'human beings will have no outlet for their surplus energy except in hatred and leader worship'.[19] Orwell's 'Notes on Nationalism', first published in *Polemic* (whose contributors included Bertrand Russell and A.J. Ayer) in 1945, presents Orwell's idiosyncratic analysis of nationalism, reserving its most scathing criticisms for the intellectuals who were the journal's readers. These essays display Orwell's capacity to construct arguments that purposely challenge the readers of the journal in which they appeared, exemplifying the public intellectual's role as provocateur. They likewise illustrate a more general point: public intellectuals communicate with what could be described as an 'informed' (if variously educated) public, inquisitive people eager for intelligent analysis. There was something democratic in Orwell's drive to 'get a hearing', and that drive required an attentiveness to the public he wished to address.

The literary quality, intellectual acuity, and argumentative energy of Orwell's essays are underscored by the fact that they not only resonated in their initial moment but continue to do so in our own time. Modern readers are still drawn to essays by Orwell that have long since lost their topicality, such as those on the immorality of the British imperial presence in Burma, the Spanish Civil War, obscure literary characters such as Raffles and Miss Blandish, and naughty seaside postcards. Orwell is relatively rare among public intellectuals of his generation in still having a sizeable audience for his essays in the twenty-first century. Bertrand Russell, by contrast, who enjoyed an enormous public profile during his lifetime, is now a largely forgotten figure, and brilliant essays by T.S. Eliot, such as 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and 'The Function of Criticism', rarely escape the academic seminar room. While some of Woolf's essays, such as *A Room of One's Own* and 'The Modern Essay' (1925), retain their importance, an oddity of Orwell's reputation as one of English literature's great essayists and Britain's most influential public intellectuals is that that reputation is greater today than it was while he lived. Some of this posthumous status derives from the global success of his

[19] G. Orwell, 'Some thoughts on the common toad' in *Complete Works*, vol. 18, p. 240.

late masterpieces *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), but Bernard Crick is on to something when he suggests that Orwell's essays 'may well constitute his lasting claim to greatness as a writer'.[20] The American critic Irving Howe judged Orwell 'the greatest English essayist since Hazlitt, maybe since Dr Johnson',[21] and while Howe's assessment might have shocked Orwell's contemporaries, it derives from elements central to the essays themselves: memorable expression, encyclopaedic interests, and original and provocative insights on controversial topics, all primary characteristics of effective public intellectuals. Ironically, through essays that now enjoy an international audience, Orwell personifies the British public intellectual he deplored.

The New Orwells

The generation of British public intellectuals who followed Orwell came to maturity in a decidedly different cultural and political climate whose effects are still with us today. The predicted triumph of liberal democracy has proven illusory, while the catastrophe of 11 September 2001, and its prolonged, complex, and contested aftermath, presents fresh challenges for public intellectuals. The British public sphere has become global and web-based, with the Internet opening up new opportunities – blogs, podcasts, and other online media among them – for connecting intellectuals and audiences. While these changes have doomed some outlets, others have survived and even prospered. Despite predictions, paper versions of journals have not disappeared. Nor has the essay, which adapts to suit to the hectic pace of contemporary life and to offer public intellectuals the same flexibility, focus, and possibilities for rhetorical punch it has always done.

Orwell the public intellectual too has survived, partly through posthumous collections of his essays, partly because other writers have taken him as a model of independent thought, clear expression, and leftist political thinking. Stefan Collini has labelled the historian Tony Judt (1948–2010) and the journalist Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011) 'New Orwells'.[22]

[20] Crick's assessment comes more than thirty years after Orwell's death; see his 'Introduction: An essay' in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, ed. B. Crick (London: Penguin, 1984), p. vii. This collection distilled forty essays from the four-volume *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. S. Orwell and I. Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968).

[21] I. Howe, 'George Orwell: "As the bones know"', *Harper's Magazine* (January 1969), 98.

[22] S. Collini, *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 267–89. Collini's third 'New Orwell', Timothy Garton Ash, is not considered here.

Acknowledging his debt to Orwell, Hitchens remarks: 'By declining to lie, even as far as possible to himself, and by his determination to seek elusive but verifiable truth, [Orwell] showed how much can be accomplished by an individual who unites the qualities of intellectual honesty and moral courage.'[23] Judt's widow notes that Judt the essayist most admired 'Albert Camus, whose photo sat on his desk, and George Orwell, who it seems to me, was everywhere'.[24] Like Orwell, Judt and Hitchens were brilliant, fluent, prolific, and, when necessary, polemical. Like Orwell, they used essays published in periodicals to reach discrete audiences.

But there were clear differences. Most of the journals that had sustained Orwell had folded by 1950, and whereas Orwell had gone straight from Eton to join the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, both Hitchens and Judt were Oxbridge alumni. Hitchens, a high-end columnist, wrote first for the British *New Stateman* and then, after moving to the United States in the 1980s, for *The Nation*, *Slate*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Atlantic*, among others. He also continued to contribute essays and reviews on political and cultural issues to British literary magazines such as *The London Review of Books* (*LRB*) and *The Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*). Hitchens described himself as 'Anglo-American', and Judt also became a transatlantic essayist after his move to the United States in the 1980s. His posthumous collection, *When the Facts Change: Essays, 1995–2010*, contains dozens of essays on copious subjects reprinted from highbrow journals such as *The New York Review of Books* (*NYRB*), *The Atlantic*, and *The New Republic* on the American side, and the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books* on the British.[25] The essay supplied him with a more focused and immediate vehicle for his views than his scholarly books, both on areas aligned with his academic studies as a history professor at New York University and on others beyond. Essays provided him with a means to 'seed' the public ground by broadcasting widely on aspects of modern European history, culture, and politics that many of his readers might know little about.

Hitchens and Judt represent different types of public intellectual: the polemicist and the academic. The titles of Hitchens's essay collections (*For the Sake of Argument*, *Arguably*, and *And Yet* . . .) advertise someone

[23] C. Hitchens, 'The importance of being Orwell' in *And Yet . . . Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 320.

[24] J. Homans, 'Introduction: In good faith' in T. Judt, *When the Facts Change: Essays, 1995–2010*, ed. Homans (London: W. Heinemann, 2010), p. 10.

[25] J. Homans (ed.), 'Chronological list of Tony Judt's published essays and criticism' in Judt, *When the Facts Change*, pp. 367–73.

predisposed to quarrel, which he did, across literature, culture, politics, history, and religion. He drew on an astonishing intellectual range; *Arguably* (2011) itself contains over a hundred essays on such diverse topics as Thomas Jefferson, Harry Potter, Benazir Bhutto, the fate of the euro, Jewish power, and *Animal Farm*. Hitchens brilliantly deployed the essay's short length and sharp focus to instruct, persuade, and challenge. His essay titles itch for a fight: 'Why Women Aren't Funny'; 'What Happened to the Suicide Bombers of Jerusalem?'; 'North Korea: A Nation of Racist Dwarves', and so forth. His different topics required different argumentative strategies and different tonal registers.

Hitchens's energetic prose and forthright manner enliven his provocative but astute analyses, as in his prescient assessment after the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995: 'this kind of American "populism" has always been tainted by its kinship with racism and superstition, and its servility to the very power it ostensibly rails against. It leads to Huey Long and Ross Perot, not to Walden.'[26] It can also be seen in his incisive and self-aware assessment of the Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James: 'the real test of a radical or revolutionary is not the willingness to confront the orthodoxy and arrogance of the rulers but the readiness to contest illusions and falsehoods among close friends and allies'.[27] In *Mortality* (2012), a collection of essays tracking the progress of the cancer that killed him at the age of sixty-two, we get this mordant yet witty assessment: 'My father had died, and very swiftly, too, of cancer of the esophagus. He was seventy-nine. I am sixty-one. In whatever sort of a "race" life may be, I have very abruptly become a finalist.'[28] With his discerning eye, purposive aggression, and humour, Hitchens embodied the public intellectual as a compelling combination of streetfighter, wit, and polymath.

Judt, the academic, was a more measured public intellectual, whose essays often drew on his scholarship. He constructed a significant presence beyond academia, and we can see his prodigious scope in his 2008 collection, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*, which reprints essays from *The New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The New York Review of Books*. Those essays venture (as Judt himself puts it) 'from French Marxists to American foreign policy, from the economics of globalization to the memory of evil – and they range in geography from Belgium to Israel. But they have

[26] C. Hitchens, 'Look over your shoulder', *London Review of Books*, 17:10 (25 May 1995), www.lrb.co.uk/v17/n10/christopher-hitchens/look-over-your-shoulder (accessed 1 August 2023).
[27] C. Hitchens, *For the Sake of Argument: Essays and Minority Reports* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 325–6.
[28] C. Hitchens, *Mortality* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012), p. 4.

two dominant concerns. The first is the role of ideas and the responsibility of intellectuals . . . . [the second is] the place of recent history in an age of forgetting.'[29] They attempt to reintroduce remembering into public understanding, treating the absence of an informed historical perspective as an ethical failure. History matters, his essays insist. Public intellectuals matter too, for their insights and capacity to influence thinking and action. The essays of *Reappraisals* stress the positive social impact of Edward Said and Albert Camus and the negative impact of Louis Althusser and Sartre.

Arguments about the responsibility of public intellectuals animated both Judt and Hitchens, but where much of Judt's thinking and writing drew from scholarly expertise, Hitchens's views drew on personal experience, as we see especially in his response to the aftermath of 9/11. He divides the 'War' section of his essay collection *Love, Poverty and War* into 'Before September' and 'After September', and in 'On Becoming American', written for *The Atlantic* in 2005, he writes: 'For me, September 11, 2001, really did "change everything".'[30] He largely supported the Bush administration, chastising leftist writers in highly personal terms in essays like 'Of Sin, the Left, & Islamic Fascism'. Blasting former associates Sam Husseini and Noam Chomsky for their criticism of the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, Hitchens in this *Nation* essay of 24 September 2001 calls them 'soft on crime and soft on fascism. No political coalition is possible with such people . . . . it no longer matters what they think.'[31] And in 'A Rejoinder to Noam Chomsky' of the following month, he argues that Chomsky 'has lost or is losing the qualities that made him a great moral and political tutor in the years of the Vietnam War'.[32] Such personal attacks benefited from one aspect of the essay form: unlike scholarly books, the essays of public intellectuals escape the requirement for extensive proof to prosecute their case. Powered by Hitchens's articulate prose, his essays demonstrate how the polemical public intellectual can use the form effectively to convince readers or to lob rhetorical grenades at opponents.

Not that the academic Judt shied away from controversy. A left-leaning Jew, he was critical of Israel and its leaders' regular misuse of history to justify unsavoury acts. In 'Israel: The Alternative' in *The New York Review of*

[29] T. Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 1.
[30] Hitchens, 'On becoming American' in *And Yet*, p. 55.
[31] C. Hitchens, 'Of sin, the Left, & Islamic fascism' in *Love, Poverty and War: Journeys and Essays* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), p. 420.
[32] C. Hitchens, 'A rejoinder to Noam Chomsky' in *Love, Poverty and War*, p. 426.

Books (2003) he charges that Israel 'has imported a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on, a world of individual rights, open frontiers, and international law. . . . Israel, in short, is an anachronism.'[33] Other essays – 'Israel Without Clichés' in *The New York Times* (2010); 'The Road to Nowhere' in *The New York Review of Books* (2002); 'Israel Must Unpick its Ethnic Myth' in *The Financial Times* (2009) – drive home Judt's sustained critique of what he viewed as Israel's criminally anti-historical leaders.[34] These essays, grouped together in a section of *When the Facts Change* titled 'Israel, the Holocaust and the Jews', show the academic public intellectual introducing complex, hotly contested ideas into the public sphere via newspapers and journals.

The following section of the same collection ('9/11 and the New World Order') details Judt's very different response from Hitchens to the events of 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq. Judt energetically opposes what Hitchens just as energetically supports. In an essay titled 'Bush's Useful Idiots' (2006), Judt claims that 'Christopher Hitchens and other erstwhile left-liberal pundits now expert in "Islamo-Fascism" . . . *are* familiar – and comfortable – with a binary division of the world along ideological lines.' He invokes Lenin in berating such '"useful idiots" of the War on Terror'.[35] These examples illustrate how public intellectuals can deploy essays in argumentative hand-to-hand combat. Given Orwell's own inclination to throw himself into struggles, rhetorically or actually (as during the Spanish Civil War), it should not surprise us that two 'New Orwells' might do the same – and against each other. Still, Judt might agree with Hitchens in drawing this lesson from Orwell: 'it matters not what you think, but *how* you think; and that politics are relatively unimportant, while principles have a way of enduring, as do the few irreducible individuals who maintain allegiance to them'.[36]

Public Intellectuals as Outsiders

Not all of Orwell's successors were 'New Orwells'. Tariq Ali (born 1943) and Mary Beard (born 1955) introduce fresh perspectives on subjects like the history of Islam and ancient Rome, cultures of radical dissent, and feminism.

[33] T. Judt, 'Israel: the alternative' in *When the Facts Change*, p. 116.
[34] Judt, *When the Facts Change*, Part 2, pp. 107–67.
[35] T. Judt, 'Bush's useful idiots', *London Review of Books*, 28:18 (21 September 2006), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n18/tony-judt/bush-s-useful-idiots (accessed 1 August 2023); and above.
[36] C. Hitchens, *Orwell's Victory* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 150.

Ali, a lifelong gadfly, and Beard, a Classics professor, personify public intellectuals as outsiders. Pakistan-born Ali invoked Orwell to defend his own, more radical marginality: 'Orwell wrote as someone who belonged to Britain and half-appreciated its institutional eccentricities. I was an outsider congenitally incapable of such sentiments.'[37] Ali's career fuses writing and political activism: 'If you can't always fight on the barricades, go on demonstrations, then fight back with your pen. Never write to please or prevaricate or, as in the academy today, become cautious or write in a jargon, a private language that students repeat in order to climb upwards.'[38] He recognised that public intellectuals need to speak clearly.

Mary Beard, at first glance, seems no outsider. Former professor of classics at Cambridge University, she appears the very model of the British academic insider. But her specialisms in Roman history and the classics – though cornerstones of a traditional university curriculum – have 'outsider' status among the public she strives to educate and enthuse through essays and other outlets for public intellectualism, like books, radio and television. She also endeavours to demystify the arcane world of academia, with her blog, *A Don's Life*, inviting the public as 'outsiders' into a pampered, yet chaotic realm by exposing the pettiness of academic politics and the biases in academic decision-making. Occupying 'outsider' status as a female academic, she writes about sexual discrimination inside and outside the university. Ali, the inveterate protester, and Beard, the classics professor, illuminate the diverse range of public intellectual contributions to cultural life.

Both Ali and Beard contribute regularly to public periodical literature. Ali's favoured topics differ from those of Hitchens and Judt by focusing on the political situation in India and Pakistan, or on Islam in the ancient and modern worlds, as in essays like 'Pakistan at Sixty' (2007); 'Winged Words' (2021), a 4,000-word review of Maxime Rodinson's *Muhammad*; and 'It Needn't Be Done' (2015) on the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, when Muslim terrorists raided the offices of the Paris-based satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, killing twelve staff in retaliation for its satirisation of Muhammad.[39] Ali is equally adept on other topics, but his major contribution to mainstream journals like *The London*

[37] T. Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 183–4.
[38] J. Watson and T. Ali, 'Writing as a political animal', *Minnesota Review*, 89 (2017), 106.
[39] T. Ali, 'Pakistan at sixty', *London Review of Books*, 29:19 (4 October 2007), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v29/n19/tariq-ali/pakistan-at-sixty; 'Winged words', *London Review of Books*, 43:12 (17 June 2021), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n12/tariq-ali/winged-words; and 'It didn't need to be done', *London Review of Books*, 37:3 (5 February 2015), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v37/n03/tariq-ali/it-didn-t-need-to-be-done (all accessed 1 August 2023).

Review of Books over several decades has been as educator, his essays providing informed analyses of topics outside the expertise of its average reader. Ali associates most strongly with the Marxist *New Left Review* (*NLR*). Launched in 1960, this journal has changed directions in response to transformational political developments, most notably the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it retains its commitment to Marxist politics, supplying a space for radical political thinking in the public sphere.[40] Its longest-serving editor, the academic Perry Anderson, who also contributes essays to *The London Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, describes the *NLR* as a journal with intellectually 'developed' rather than merely agitational material; radical, but not overtly scholarly, and aimed at the intelligent public.[41] Ali sits on its editorial committee and contributes regularly, an early representative essay being 'Revolutionary Perspectives for Pakistan' (1970).[42] *NLR*'s Marxist leanings meant it reached a relatively small audience for most of its first five decades, but Ali noted in 2017 that the journal 'is now read by larger numbers than ever before because of online access. Nonsubscribers can read two or three articles free in every issue; subscribers have access to the whole digital archive and its historical past . . . . [E]ach year more than a quarter of a million articles are downloaded. So digitalization has been a big boon to us.'[43] Something similar applies to online journals of all stripes, which give public intellectuals unprecedented access to different publics, and vice versa.

The *NLR*'s publishing firm, Verso, has published several of Ali's essay collections, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Sodom and Other Essays* (2009) and *The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan: A Chronicle Foretold* (2021). These works highlight his engrained international perspective, his argumentative approach, and his dexterous use of the essay form. *Protocols*, for example, examines writers such as Marcel Proust, Miguel de Cervantes, and Sir Salman Rushdie; in the case of the latter, Ali uses Rushdie's honorific title to rebuke him: 'As for accepting a knighthood from Blair, the less said the better' since the honour was bestowed by a 'corrupt and despicable regime'.[44] Ali's awareness of Indian and Pakistani history and culture allows him to point out aspects of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame*

[40] See Anon., 'A Brief History of *New Left Review*, 1960–2010' in *New Left Review*, https://newleftreview.org/pages/history (accessed 1 August 2023).
[41] P. Anderson, 'Editorial: Renewals', *New Left Review*, 1 n.s. (January–February 2000), 8.
[42] T. Ali, 'Revolutionary perspectives for Pakistan', *New Left Review*, 1:63 (September–October 1970), https://newleftreview.org/issues/i63/articles/tariq-ali-revolutionary-perspectives-for-pakistan (accessed 1 August 2023).
[43] T. Ali, *The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan* (London: Verso, 2021), p. 109.
[44] T. Ali, *The Protocols of the Elders of Sodom and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 104.

(1983) that might escape insiders. *The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan*, by contrast, catalogues his antagonism to American military aggression dating back to the Vietnam War. Remarkably, the book (made up of twenty-seven essays written between 1983 and 2021) was published three months after America's withdrawal from Kabul, its preface written the day the Taliban entered the capital. Ali acknowledges that 'Alan Rusbridger (former editor of the *Guardian*) and Mary-Kay Wilmers (former editor and still dowager-editor at the *London Review of Books*) . . . published most of my shorter and longer pieces despite not always agreeing with me (this could well be an understatement)'.[45] The validity of Ali's overall analysis is less important than how the book incorporates articles and essays written over decades for different journals that broadcast Ali's 'outsider' analyses to broader audiences than he could expect in *NLR*. The moment of essay publication presented *Guardian* and *LRB* audiences with potent real-time analyses that, once collected in book form under the title *The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan*, track a developing political disaster, and (in Orwell's terms) expose lies and draw attention to facts for diverse and changing readerships.

Beard also represents modern public intellectuals who offer oblique, challenging takes on the contemporary world. Drawing on her academic expertise in Roman history and the classics, she conveys the joys and benefits of her specialism to the public, interspersing the publication of her scholarly books with briefer displays of public intellectualism.[46] As a gifted media performer, she combines academic gravitas with personal ebullience, and contributes to popular television series, such as the BBC's 2016 miniseries *Mary Beard's Ultimate Rome: Empire without Limit*. Beard also fronted two episodes of *Civilisations*, a 2018 updating of Sir Kenneth Clark's highbrow 1969 series, *Civilisation*. Clark embodied the elite intellectual of his era, while Beard provides a compelling and admired example of the contemporary public intellectual.

As classics editor of the *TLS* and contributor to the *LRB*, Beard understands the value of such papers in publicising her academic specialisation. As we see in the collection *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures and Innovations*, she attempts to activate the general public's interest in other eras by revising and reprinting her essays from the *LRB*, *TLS*, and the *NYRB*. She wonders 'how we can *engage* with or *challenge* the classical tradition, and why even in the twenty-

[45] Ali, *The Forty-Year War*, p. 149.

[46] See M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), and *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), on the two types of books, respectively.

first century there is so much in Classics still to *argue* about'.[47] Her *LRB* essays and reviews also allow her to investigate the status of women in the ancient and contemporary worlds, including at universities. She draws on personal experience, as, initially, the sole female lecturer in Cambridge's Classics department. Examining the historical situation of women at university in her review essay of Noel Annan's *The Dons* (1999), she declares that 'Outside men's colleges, clubs and dining rituals . . . . there are no plausible "dons" in Annan's sense of the word.'[48] One contribution to the *LRB*'s 'Diary' section presents an essay that combines scathing criticism of the methodology and conclusions of a study of rape with an analysis of her own rape as a graduate student.[49] Beard boldly addresses different scientific, moral, cultural, and personal aspects of rape, and her measured combination of experience and academic insight takes advantage of the essay form to fuse an account of highly personal experience with sustained intellectual critique. Beard returns to the topic in her *LRB* essay review of Germaine Greer's 2018 pamphlet, *On Rape*, defending Greer's work while chiding her for inconsistencies and deficiencies in her argument.[50] Here as elsewhere, Beard uses her position as a respected public intellectual to analyse and comment on fraught topics like rape.

The *LRB*'s Winter Lectures series created public opportunities for Beard to air her views in lectures that were published as essays, among them, 'The Public Voice of Women' (2014) and 'Women in Power' (2017). Both formats were supplemented by podcasts.[51] She developed the essay version of the lectures substantially, adding illustrations, and publishing her historical account of misogyny under the title *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (2017), a *New York Times* bestseller. The links between the essay (published in paper and online), the podcast, and the book demonstrate Beard's ability to command different types of platforms to promote her ideas. Her blog, *A Don's Life* (later published in book form), her lecture podcasts, and her

[47] M. Beard, *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures and Innovations* (London: Profile Books, 2013), p. 6.

[48] M. Beard, 'What once seemed certain is now an open question', *London Review of Books*, 22:9 (27 April 2000), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v22/n09/mary-beard/what-once-seemed-certain-is-now-an-open-question (accessed 1 August 2023).

[49] On the relation between the diary and the essay, see Bannet, 'Between public and private' in this volume.

[50] M. Beard, 'The Greer method', *London Review of Books*, 41:20 (24 October 2019), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n20/mary-beard/the-greer-method (accessed 1 August 2023).

[51] M. Beard, 'The public voice of women', *London Review of Books*, 36:6 (20 March 2014), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n06/mary-beard/the-public-voice-of-women, and 'Women in power', *London Review of Books*, 39:6 (16 March 2017), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v39/n06/mary-beard/women-in-power (both accessed 1 August 2023).

work on radio and television illustrate some of the channels available to the modern public intellectual. Yet the essay, a form invented by a sixteenth-century French nobleman, still retains a central place in the public intellectual's repertoire as an instrument for education, stimulation, and connection.

Conclusion

Tony Judt argues that the 'twentieth century was the century of the intellectual'.[52] Whether the same will be said of the current century is at present unknowable. Certainly, the public sphere has been changed by technology, the Internet, for example, offering instant access to unprecedented amounts of information through multiple platforms. This can be seen positively, as public intellectuals potentially have the capacity to reach massive international audiences online, while readers now have access to reviews, opinions, and analyses from sources other than printed journals and papers. The Internet functions as an astonishing archive, allowing a reader with a functioning electronic device anywhere on the planet to access essays by Orwell, Hitchens, Beard, Woolf, or Montaigne in an instant. But the sheer volume of material available, and the competing pull of other attractions, threaten to overwhelm readers, debasing the processes of reading and thinking that public intellectuals expect, and that serious public debate requires.

Nicholas Carr in *The Shallows* (2010) claimed that the Internet had changed the way people read and think. The endless possibility of easy distraction reduces our capacity for complex thought. Carr reported that people (including university students and instructors) admitted that they had stopped reading serious books.[53] Without denying the dire implications of this change, we might at least confidently assert that the essay's range of topic, its brevity and foregrounding of the personal perspective, make it a productive and attractive vehicle for presenting and consuming ideas and opinions in an age of distraction. It would be ironic if Montaigne's formal innovation proved tailor-made for our hectic, democratic time, while the scholarly book on which he depended largely for the material of his own essays fades away. Whatever the nature of public intellectual life in the future, public intellectuals (like the British examples discussed here) seem likely to survive, continuing to deploy essays as a way of contributing to the collective exchange of inventive, contentious, and instructive ideas on a global scale.

[52] Judt, *Reappraisals*, p. 12.
[53] N. Carr, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

44

Essayism in Literary Theory

RONAN MCDONALD

Consider 'against' in essay titles. It is not as ubiquitous as 'On' or 'Of' but 'Against' essays have been there from the start: Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* include a piece against laziness ('Contre la fainéantise'). Another example is Iris Murdoch's 1961 essay 'Against Dryness', in which she complains of novels that offer merely tired conventions or personifications of an author's viewpoint. Susan Sontag's 1964 'Against Interpretation' is perhaps the best-known modern example, but more recently Mark Greif's 2016 essay collection, *Against Everything*, proffers a curmudgeonly resistance to the blandishments of consumerism. The essay, and in particular its subgenre, the critical essay, lends itself to oppositionality, to a rhetoric of contrarian questioning, or to exposing inherited beliefs. In its sceptical mode, by pushing away and doubting, the essay can counter the converse tendency of the form, signalled in the word's etymology: *essayer*, to attempt, to venture, to espouse something. In other words, by adopting the spirit of critique, the essay can repel its own uncertainties, its orientation towards risk.

One reason why the critical essay has been so dominant in the humanities is that this quizzical and suspicious posture signals a certain tough-mindedness, aligned with the university's epistemic mission. The rise of English as a university discipline, since I.A. Richards first sought to establish a science of close reading, has been a battle against looseness, impressionism, mere feeling, or taste.[1] One reason for the appeal of critique is that it affords rigour and a sense of authority, especially when allied to a genealogical method that

[1] For an account of the essay's role in the rise of English as a university discipline, see Alexandra Lawrie's discussion in 'The essay and the rise of university English' in this volume (Ch. 22). For an account of the role of the essay in the context of British education more broadly, see Jon Klancher's 'The academic essay: rhetoric and pedagogy' in this volume (Ch. 21). Histories of English as a discipline include G. Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), C. Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1996), R. Scholes, *The Rise and Fall of English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), and J. North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

exposes the social location of an idea or a value system. It clears away the obfuscations of myth, mystification, and ideology. In Britain during the final decades of the twentieth century, this critical spirit, allied to cultural and intellectual movements coming out of the New Left, spawned cultural studies and cultural materialism.[2] It also satisfied an institutional and pedagogical expectation, overt or implicit, of firm and robust investigative procedure and resolution. Most critical movements have emerged from left-wing politics, even if some are more explicitly activist and *engagé* than others. Marxists often indict post-structuralism and postmodernism for political evasion and complacency.[3] Yet the French philosophy from which so much anglophone literary theory of the 1970s and 1980s emerges owes much to the radical energy of the late 1960s. Under the 'theory' umbrella, one might expect to find no shortage of the 'heresy' and the 'transgression of the orthodoxy of thought' that Theodor Adorno, in his famous essay, finds in the essay form.[4]

Many of the literary-critical movements that have dominated in the UK and in the USA over the past fifty years saw themselves as undermining and challenging dominant power formations, hierarchies, and ideologies, whether of capitalism or, more fundamentally, of the Enlightenment and its legacies. This period saw the ascendancy of a politically inflected academic ethos that ferreted out the ideological goblins in literary works, debunking received ideas, demystifying numinous effects, denaturalising cultural prejudice, and denuding obfuscatory veils. However, the problem with oppositionality, like all self-styled iconoclasm or counter-culture, is that it can become its own badge of conformity, its own petrified orthodoxy. Ivan Kreilkamp's playfully self-negating piece in *The New Yorker*, 'Against "Against X"' (2014), argues that the 'against' essay has become contrived, formulaic, and merely provocative.[5] Similarly, in recent years there have been interventions in the humanities expressing a jadedness with critique and

[2] 'Theory' – traditionally garlanded with the capital 'T' – can, like the term 'essay', be an inexact handle, an umbrella label, covering heterogeneous and even conflicting schools of thought. The post-Leavisite Marxism of Raymond Williams in the 1950s, which adopted the theories of Antonio Gramsci for the critical analysis of culture, could be classed as 'theory' insofar as it led to cultural materialism. Another stream, originating primarily in France, saw the structuralism of the 1960s mutate into post-structuralism and deconstruction, which ran alongside and influenced various critical schools, including feminism, postcolonialism, and queer theory.

[3] See, e.g., T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

[4] T.W. Adorno, 'The essay as form', trans. B. Hullot-Kentor and F. Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 171.

[5] I. Kreilkamp, 'Against "Against [X]"', *New Yorker* (27 August 2014), www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/x (accessed 1 August 2023).

the hermeneutic of suspicion and calling for more reparative and attached modes of reading.[6] This chapter considers the rise and fall of theory in the UK by attending to the essay, rather than the seminal books that are usually thought to constitute the theoretical corpus. It will map the media ecology that allowed essays and theoretical articles to flourish, and the institutional pressures and expectations that often prevented academic writing from being essayistic in the Montaignian sense. It will show how British theory in the New Left mutated and moved into the academy, merging and conflicting with post-structuralism, and it will argue that that conflict mirrors a paradox within the essay form between critique and creative obliquity.[7] It will conclude with the essay's relationship to 'postcritique' and new possibilities being opened for the theoretical essay outside the academy.

Les Cinquante-Huitards

If 1968 was the signal year for French theory, one could make a case that in Britain the major year was 1958. As Simon During has argued, the early roots of academic theory in Britain came from outside the academy and from social rather than strictly intellectual forces.[8] Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* was published this year, as perhaps the single most important work for the development of cultural theory in the UK. But it is sometimes forgotten that it grew from an essay, 'The Idea of Culture', published five years earlier.[9] Also published in 1958 was an important collection of essays edited by Norman MacKenzie, *Conviction*, which included economists, politicians, journalists, scientists, and literary figures like Williams and Richard Hoggart, whose *The Uses of Literacy* (the other foundational work of cultural studies), was published in 1957. Iris Murdoch's essay for the volume, 'A House of Theory', pleaded for renewed intellectual energy to refresh the tired socialist movement, and offered a broad history of ideas. Williams's essay, 'Culture is Ordinary', made a powerful argument for considering culture not just in the framework of edification and moral uplift espoused

[6] R. Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) and *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[7] For another angle on this conflict, between analysis and productive obscurity, see E. Plunkett's 'Plain English: essays and analytic philosophy' in this volume (Ch. 28).

[8] S. During, 'Socialist ends: the British New Left, cultural studies and the emergence of academic "theory"', *Postcolonial Studies*, 10:1 (2007), 23–39. On this idea, too, see J. Pugh's 'Blogging in Britain: essays in the digital age' in this volume (Ch. 46).

[9] R. Williams, 'The idea of culture', *Essays in Criticism*, 3:3 (July 1953), 239–66, and *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958).

by Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis, but also in its anthropological sense as a way of life and mode of social expression and creative endeavour.

Williams's 'Culture is Ordinary' is richly descriptive and personal, as well as theoretical and analytical, or in other words, 'essayistic'. It begins with a bus journey from Hereford to South Wales, where Williams was born, taking in pitheads, farming valleys, and mountains. The essay continually emphasises the author's perspective, drawing on both his working-class Welsh upbringing and his training as a literary academic at Cambridge to think through different conceptions of culture. He engages with and departs from Karl Marx and Leavis, whom he acknowledges left a deep impression on his mind. Yet this is not an 'against' essay. Rather the piece is personal and, if insistent, is also generous and affectively expansive, a bit like its subject matter. In a sense, it enacts its own argument, traversing the British country in search of ordinary culture, and so deploying a horizontal inclusive meaning of the concept in place of the vertical sense of high culture. Here at the birth of cultural studies, is an essay that draws on different registers, perspectives, tropes, and economies of expression.

Cultural studies, as is well known, grew out of the pioneering work of Stuart Hall, Hoggart, and Williams, and led to the founding of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1964. Student numbers at British universities exploded in the post-war period. A new generation emerged hungry for its own intellectual mission and mistrustful of the staid, cloistered, and elite academic establishment, with its aesthetic ideology steeped in hierarchy and exclusivity. Part of this youthful generation became unsatisfied with the reformist direction of the British Labour Party and sought to find new outlets, including in radical journals and newspapers. Another part responded to the widespread disillusionment with the Communist Party following the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary with renewed self-reflexivity and an urge to find a more native articulation of left-wing politics, albeit one attuned to international currents. Institutional, generational, structural, and media shifts created a burgeoning of left-wing thought in the British universities and public sphere, and much of it found an outlet in essays.

In January 1960, *New Left Review* was founded as a merger between two other recent journals, *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*, and styled itself in its early days as the British answer to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les temps modernes*.[10] It was a crucial conduit for Marxist analyses of culture,

[10] D. Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect? A History of New Left Review* (London: Merlin Press, 2007); L. Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993).

especially those of Antonio Gramsci and, as theory became more embedded in universities, of Louis Althusser. The first editor-in-chief was the cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who was succeeded in 1962 by Perry Anderson, who nominally remained editor until 1983. Without the same literary focus as *The London Review of Books*, which was founded during the 1979 lockout at *The Times*, *New Left Review* was nonetheless a key venue where literary theory germinated and several seminal essays introducing continental thought into Britain appeared, especially under Anderson's editorship. Anderson, surely the most suave and authoritative essayist among British left-wing intellectuals, published numerous significant interventions of his own. As part of a general indictment of the slackness and inertia of British culture, his 'Components of the National Culture' (1968) dealt a serious blow to Leavis's Great Tradition and the compartmentalised disciplinary structure that prevailed in universities.[11] Anderson argued that British culture was marked by bourgeois quiescence, reinforced by anti-revolutionary immigrants who came to Britain during the war: 'The chloroforming effect of such a cultural configuration, its silent and constant underpinning of the social status quo, are deadly.'[12] His range of reference, sweep, synthesis, and polemical style emerge in an essay writing 'against' dominant conditions with a verve and intellectual energy that chimed with the moment.

Many debates around Western Marxism, psychoanalysis, and social theory that proved so foundational to cultural studies in the UK happened first in *New Left Review*. Juliet Mitchell's 'Women: The Longest Revolution' (1966) was a key intervention in allying British feminism to left-wing activism. Drawing on theories of women's oppression from Friedrich Engels to Betty Friedan, her bold assertions and declarative sections – 'Women in Socialist Theory', 'Engels', 'Production', 'Reproduction', 'Contraception', 'From Nature to Culture' – resemble a manifesto, exhilarating and commanding. Mitchell infuses her wide-ranging essay with a pioneering determination to clear the ground, a style typical of *New Left Review* essays of this time, a style that in Mitchell's case, as in many others, finds its expression first in this shorter form.

[11] P. Anderson, 'Components of the national culture', *New Left Review*, 1:50 (July–August 1968), 56. In a later two-part essay, Anderson revises his critique in 'Components', whose second part discusses aesthetics and literary theory: 'A culture in contraflow – II', *New Left Review*, 1:182 (July–August 1990), 85–137, https://newleftreview.org/issues/i182/articles/perry-anderson-a-culture-in-contraflow-ii (accessed 1 August 2023).

[12] Anderson, 'Components of the national culture', 56.

As it went through various phases and reinventions, *New Left Review* maintained a strongly international outlook, not just in looking to continental Europe, the philosophical and cultural centre, for intellectual energy, but also by following decolonial currents in Indochina and Latin America, the war in Vietnam, and various econometric questions. Issues of culture and cultural theory endured along with an interest in movies and the media, with Peter Wollen writing regularly on filmmakers and film semiotics. Wollen's breakthrough book, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), is another example of a major work of theory that emerged first in essay form in *New Left Review*.

The Institutionalisation of Theory

In the preface to his *Collected Essays*, looking back on pieces from across forty years, Aldous Huxley attempted an inquiry into the essay form.[13] He did not divide the essay into static types or taxonomies, but rather spoke of the three 'poles' around which the form was oriented: first, the personal and the autobiographical; second, the objective, factual, and concrete-particular; and, third, the abstract-universal. Most essayists, according to Huxley, are comfortable in only one or two of these categories, though the most 'richly satisfying' essays move between all three. Each of the poles has its benefits and defects, though Huxley lingers on the dangers of the third, which he regards – with a stolid English empiricism – as leading to the excesses of French abstraction, 'a completely bodiless language can never do justice to the data of immediate experience'.[14]

One wonders if Huxley, who died in 1963, might have found more examples of bodiless language had he lived to see the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure and French linguistic theory in Britain in the coming decades, especially within the university. Huxley did not consider how institutional expectations and norms in higher education might reorient his poles – how, for example, essays published in an academic context would tilt towards the objective fact or the abstract claim rather than the personal or evaluative confession. Yet his triangle offers one way to think about a key question for the rise and fall of theory in the UK: the relationship between (1) the essay as a personal, digressive, self-interrupting, and transgressive art form as used by British authors like William Hazlitt, Virginia Woolf, and George Orwell, and (2) the academic article as objective, impersonal, highly

[13] A. Huxley, Preface to *Collected Essays* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1958), pp. v–ix.
[14] Ibid., pp. vi, vii.

structured, and adhering to institutional expectation and, therefore, tamer and less combustible.

As the century advanced, the theory branch that grew from the British New Left cross-pollinated with French philosophy and Yale-school deconstruction. Some of the energies around theory happened in new universities like Cardiff and Sussex, where centres were formed and where major theorists worked, such as the founders of that peculiarly British version of theory – cultural materialism – including Jonathan Dollimore, Terence Hawkes, and Catherine Belsey. Journals eager to publish essays by a new wave of academics versed in theory sprang up from the late 1970s: *Oxford Literary Review* (1977), *Paragraph* (1983), *Textual Practice* (1987), *Parallax* (1995), and *Angelaki* (1993), all now published by mainstream academic presses. Some of these journals, especially those concerned with continental theory, were accused of pulling up the drawbridge, using recondite ideas and specialised idiolect to keep general readers out. But other publishing developments were aimed precisely at opening up theoretical reflection to a general readership. The Cardiff-based Shakespeare scholar Terence Hawkes, the first editor of *Textual Practice*, also edited the New Accents series initiated by Methuen and taken over by Routledge, which played a major role in seeding theory in British curricula. Initiated in 1977, this series included forty-one short, punchy primers, published at a length that blurs the book-essay distinction.

One of them, *Critical Practice* (1980) by Catherine Belsey, became a ubiquitous undergraduate text. Belsey turned theory into a pedagogical exercise, but the voracity and range of her little book or long essay, drawing on Marxism, post-Sausserian linguistics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, reader-response theory, and Barthesian critique, had brio as well as lucidity. 'The undertaking', she admits, 'is in a sense contradictory: to explain is inevitably to reduce the unfamiliarity and so to reduce the extent of the challenge of the post-Saussurean position.'[15] This was the paradox that all theory primers would confront, though some less overtly than others. Another such book, Terry Eagleton's turbo-selling *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), looks by its title and cover to be a standard textbook or impartial introduction. But it is really a series of fretted-together, essay-length takedowns of the various theoretical movements that influenced the rise of English as an academic discipline. Together, they constitute a critique from a Marxist perspective of the concept

[15] C. Belsey, *Critical Practice*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

of literature, aimed at exposing ideological obfuscation. Its jaunty and unbuttoned style, its cheeky similes ('structuralism is rather like killing a person in order to examine more conveniently the circulation of the blood'), and its polemical flamboyance overlain with twinkle-eyed English common sense, underpin its massive success in the academic marketplace.[16] There is not much engagement with the opacity of the theorists Eagleton summarises and then dispatches, nor much demand that readers sit with the discomfort of partial comprehension in order to avoid reductive interpretation.

Against the Expository Essay

Academic protocols value rigour, authority, and precision, which can sometimes run athwart a brand of theory not oriented to critique so much as what we might call negative capability, a mode of writing capable of being in uncertainty, mystery, and doubt. Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy have recently highlighted the 'various ways in which the essay bristles against academic writing', which include a 'resistance to introductions, to generalization and abstraction, to accounts of its origins, its freedom from discipline, rules, and criteria'.[17] Yet if we are nominalist about it, identifying an 'essay' by what calls itself such, then the essay constitutes the lifeblood of the humanities. Students in the humanities are both consumers and producers of essays.[18] Anyone who has done an English degree over the last three or four decades is likely to have encountered Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' (1969), Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), and Hélène Cixous's 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975). These essays are one of the ways that literary theory is circulated in the anglophone world. However, undergraduates are seldom asked to replicate the idiosyncrasies, personal styles, or waywardness of Barthes or Cixous. Insofar as students' essay skills are straitened by precedent and disciplined by rubrics and guidelines that

[16] T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 109.

[17] T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present*, ed. Karshan and Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 16. On pedagogy and the essay form, see K. Spellmeyer, 'A common ground: the essay in the academy' in A.J. Butrym (ed.), *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 253–70.

[18] On this, see, in this volume, Lawrie's 'The essay and the rise of university English', Klancher's 'The academic essay: rhetoric and pedagogy', and, for the origins of humanistic writing in the essay mode, T. Karshan's 'The essay and the theme' (Ch. 20).

discourage the personal voice, forbid digression, and demand resolution, the academic essay is a sort of anti-essay in the Montaignian sense.

It could be that part of the appeal of continental theory in Britain was precisely to escape some of these academic conformities. Even as writers like Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard afforded conceptual mastery and professional capital for literary academics, they also offered the opposite – a heady escape from familiar, rigid, and controlled modes of thought and expression. In a recent essay about encountering French theory for the first time, Robert Young describes the experience as exhilaratingly risky, akin to being in the back of an unknown car in an unknown city.[19] What Young calls the 'literary' aspect of Derrida, Cixous, and other French theorists is also their essayistic quality, a digressive and oblique superfluity of style and expression that effects, for some at least, an enchanting opacity.

That heady charisma of continental theory also affected popular culture and higher journalism in *The London Review of Books* and in magazines like *New Musical Express*, where a new generation of critics attuned to European popular music and cinema emerged, many looking to cultural theorists like Barthes and Derrida as models. There was a synergy between this alluring journalistic counter-culture and the campus theorists. Many significant Gen-X cultural and political theorists, like Mark Fisher and Owen Hatherley, were first introduced to theory through music magazines and articles by Ian Penman and Paul Morley, 'self-taught intellectuals whose passionate, serious-minded writings on music culture – an early, but enduring model for Fisher – developed a reputation for a hectic, promiscuous use of continental theory and philosophy'.[20] Theory and punk music fed the intellectual charisma of each other, lending a whiff of the dissident, the subversive, and the daring, the sense of popular culture chiming with political emancipation.

Against Theory

One figure indelibly associated both with the rise of theory in Britain and the resistance to it is Frank Kermode. While we do not now think of Kermode as a pioneering literary theorist, he nonetheless has a fair claim to be the figure who more than anyone galvanised and enabled the reception and circulation of French post-structuralist theory in the UK. His legendary Critical Theory

[19] R.J.C. Young, 'Theory, philosophy, literature' in I. Goh (ed.), *French Thought and Literary Theory in the UK* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 1.
[20] S. Hammond, 'K-punk at large', *New Left Review*, 118 (July–August 2019), 37–66.

seminar, conducted while he was the Lord Northcliffe Professor of English at University College, London (1969–74), was the incubator for just about every major British theorist of the coming generation. That seminar was also where his more reflexive and metacritical books, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967) and *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (1979), were nurtured. Both works, like many major books within literary studies, emerged from lecture series, which in terms of scope and style bore a family resemblance to the periodical essay. Crossing the borders between academia and higher journalism, Kermode's critical approach was far more circumspect and modest than Perry Anderson's. Enthused and quizzical, genial and reflective, Kermode enabled the qualified reception of continental theory by a British liberal tradition. He instigated the founding of *The London Review of Books* in 1979, for which he wrote more than 200 reviews before his death. One of his early collections of essays, he claimed, 'has the unity imposed upon it by a limited mind of promiscuous habit'.[21] The critical promiscuity would endure, not just in subject but in methodological reflexivity. Opposing English provincialism, he wrote thoughtfully and receptively about theory in several essays in *The London Review of Books*.[22]

Yet, while he was initially drawn to the intellectual excitement and emancipatory possibilities of post-structuralism and cultural theory, he later became wary of its fervour and radicalism, which threatened to usurp or flatten literary value. In his 1996 memoir, he retrospectively cast literary theory as 'another country in which I went to live without feeling truly at home', and he recognised that sense of alienation 'even when it still seemed exciting, even before it became drugged with self-regard'.[23] The intellectual allure of theory, which Kermode felt and also wanted to share pedagogically, lost out to a greater imperative: writing about literary art and communicating its richness to a wide audience.[24] As his late grappling with the difficulties of literary value and its relation to history attest, it is more accurate to think of Kermode as a precursor to the post-critical moment we now occupy than as a reactionary figure who sought to stop theory.[25]

[21] F. Kermode, *Puzzles and Epiphanies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 1.
[22] See, e.g., F. Kermode's review essays 'Getting it right', *London Review of Books*, 3:8 (7 May 1981) and 'Intelligent theory', *London Review of Books*, 4:18 (7 October 1982).
[23] F. Kermode, *Not Entitled: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996), p. 198.
[24] See also F. Kermode's polemical prologue to his *An Appetite for Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[25] See R. McDonald '"Our beloved codex": Frank Kermode's modesty' in A. Sridhar et al. (eds.), *The Work of Reading: Literary Criticism in the 21st Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 133–51.

It was the flattening effect of critique when it hardened into its own orthodoxy that led to Kermode's secession from so-called theory.

Alongside the enthusiasm in academic and some cultural spheres, there was a contrapuntal reaction to literary theory in Britain, particularly in its continental manifestation. Other prominent intellectuals positioned themselves in opposition to theory during these years, writing in magazines and newspapers, among them the conservative philosopher Roger Scruton and the European literary critic George Steiner, notable figures who also had profiles outside the academy. The anti-theory essay was a recognisable seam in literary culture in the 1970s and 1980s. Christopher Ricks maintained a unique position as the leading practitioner of idiosyncratic formalism and close reading.[26] The Oxford-based *Essays in Criticism*, founded by F.W. Bateson in 1951, but now edited by Christopher Ricks and Seamus Perry, has a distinct air of cultivated, sage writing with its titular echo of Matthew Arnold. The words 'essay' and 'criticism' are both reassuringly steadfast, in a journal that strives to keep faith with literary close reading and not get carried away by 'the newest thing'. As its website avers delicately, '*Essays in Criticism* has kept a balance between the constructive and the sceptical, giving the journal particular value at a time when criticism has become so diversified.'[27] More derisory or parodic pieces often appeared in venues such as *The Times Literary Supplement* and in the weekly newspapers. *The Literary Review* was founded in 1979 by Anne Smith of Edinburgh University precisely to hold the line against obscurantist material imported from the continent. While *The London Review of Books* became a venue for cultural theory, *The Literary Review* 'wanted to create a lively, intelligent literary magazine for people who love reading but shudder at academic and intellectual jargon'.[28]

Division and sniping around style and lucidity occurs *within* the theory tent too, sometimes between the Marxist and postmodernist wings, but also around the effect of academia on expressive felicity. In an editorial launching a new series of *New Left Review* in 2000, Perry Anderson sombrely confronted the devastating setbacks of the Left in the 1980s and 1990s that resulted in the 'virtually uncontested consolidation, and universal diffusion, of neo-liberalism'.[29] Amongst his targets is the trend for left-wing intellectuals to migrate into institutions of higher learning, a development he blames on dumbed-down publishing and atrophied

[26] C. Ricks, 'In theory', *London Review of Books*, 3:7 (16 April 1981).
[27] Anon., 'About *Essays in Criticism*', *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism*, https://academic.oup.com/eic/pages/about (accessed 1 August 2023).
[28] 'History', *Literary Review*, https://literaryreview.co.uk/about (accessed 1 August 2023).
[29] P. Anderson, 'Editorial: Renewals', *New Left Review*, 1 n.s. (January–February 2000), 10.

political discourse in the public sphere. He drew on another public intellectual, Edward Said, to indict the effect this move had on writing, the standards of which 'would have left Marx or Morris speechless'; it should be a matter of honour on the Left, remarks Anderson piquantly, to 'write at least as well, without redundancy or clutter, as its adversaries'.[30] Skirmishes around this subject have broken out periodically, and again not just by irritated conservatives and bemused general readers. While those writing in a British left-wing tradition could be dry and technocratic, it was the deconstructionists and French-influenced theorists who were most often charged with pretension, jargon, and obfuscation. The latter could easily be allied with a putative indifference to a broader public, playing to the in-house elites of the academic establishment.

As an illustrative example, consider an incendiary review of Gayatri Spivak by Terry Eagleton in *The London Review of Books* of May 1999. Spivak, a translator of Derrida, became known as one of the founders of postcolonial theory, not least because of her seminal 1988 essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.[31] Questions of the sayable and unsayable, the limits of Western metaphysics, and the difficulty of cultural translation are Spivak's central concerns. In all her work, she distances herself from the blandishments of positivism and the false resolution of pat, symptomatic criticism. An exasperated Eagleton condemns Spivak's impenetrable writing, grown slack, he thinks, because she lacks a target for systematic critique or a path to emancipation. He indicts not just the allegedly 'overstuffed elliptical prose', but also singles out her 'endless digressions', 'self-interruptions', 'broken-back structure', and 'self-theatricalising'.[32] He is reviewing a full-length book here, but it will not escape notice that these epithets resemble those sometimes used in praise of 'essayism'.[33] The 'gaudy, all-licensed supermarket of the mind' in which 'any idea can apparently be permuted with any other' could, in another context, sound like a paean to the form in all its waywardness and obliquity.[34] The essay makes room for binary tendencies: precision but also digression, exactitude and imagination, hubristic polemic and circumspect play around the limits of the knowable. Many of the 'theory wars', including internal ones, hinge on privileging one over the other.

[30] Ibid., 23.
[31] G. Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.
[32] T. Eagleton, 'In the gaudy supermarket: Gayatri Spivak', *London Review of Books*, 21:10 (13 May 1999), 3–6.
[33] B. Dillon, *Essayism* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017).
[34] Eagleton, 'In the gaudy supermarket', 3.

Postcritique

Both wings of theory answered some of the institutional demands of the humanities during a phase in their history when the disciplines were reorientating and repurposing. Marxist-inflected critique offered tough-minded and unsentimental interpretations of literary texts that were cool, rational, and dispassionate. French post-structuralism offered a technical and specialised vocabulary that also secured academics' intellectual capital and institutional distinction. Approaches that did not require historical research or painstaking archival work also appealed in an era when lecturers, often located in universities at some distance from major libraries, were required to publish. One could make the case that the more professional and institutionalised literary studies in Britain became over the course of the twentieth century, both before and after theory, the more it drifted from 'essayism' in the spirit of Montaigne. For a side effect of the purging from the discipline of English of impressionism and belletrism in order to establish it as a respectable academic discipline was the removal of much of the experiential and experimental energy that comes from the personal element.

This process began with I.A. Richards's development of close reading, so long before the development of high theory. While politically accented critique could provide the requisite tough-mindedness for institutional inquiry, other more deconstructive branches of theory promised to work against the epistemic norms on which systemic knowledge acquisition was built. But whether the aspiration to unseat Anglo-American positivism really had much effect in institutions of higher learning is questionable. In Britain, while the sinuous and self-referential writing of Derrida, the essayistic panache of Barthes, the aphoristic ruminations of Walter Benjamin, and the lapidary precision of Adorno all had academic devotees, it would be hard to claim that their influence seeded lasting styles or new schools of academic writing. Few British theorists have emulated the creative brio of the best European continental criticism. It may be that, as Claire de Obaldia argues of French theorists, 'essayism functions as the paradigm of contemporary criticism, or conversely that the cutting edge of contemporary criticism has caught up with the essay'.[35] But in the British academic context, the expectations and norms of academic publishing chastened paratextual experimentation and the aphoristic style. The sense of *essayer* as 'to attempt', and of

[35] C. de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 56.

the essay as an unruly, disruptive, unassimilable form, may endure in some corners, but usually outside the academy. Often, when it crossed the Channel and put on a mortarboard and gown, theory also lost its flair and flamboyance. It is not surprising that with the exception of Barthes and Benjamin, very few of the essayists that the writer Brian Dillon celebrates and identifies as an influence in his *Essayism* (2017) are academics. 'Essayism' occurs more often at the margins, in journalism, music reviewing, or 'creative' non-fiction.

But this institutional resistance to essayism is loosening, as academics seek vehicles for more experimental writing that will allow theory and essayism to merge. The well-rehearsed challenges and setbacks faced by the humanities across the Western world, combined with the explosion of digital technologies, has led to a growth in online environments and in a para-academic ecosystem. Equally, there has been a surge of what some commentators have described as 'postcritique', a movement associated with influential (and highly essayistic, in the sense of personal and digressive) essays by Bruno Latour and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, which react against a formulaic and rote tone that has come to characterise the critical essay in the academic sphere.[36] Rita Felski argues in *The Limits of Critique* (2015), another short polemical book of metacriticism that began life in essay form, that the 'de-' prefix has become something of a reflex in literary studies, with academic literary critics setting out to debunk, demythologise, denaturalise the texts they are reading from Marxist, feminist, or postcolonial perspectives.[37] Felski maintains that 'critique' needs to break out of its negative reflex and that literary studies should expand to a less suspicious, more reparative approach, less given to compulsive unveiling and more willing to own its attachments.[38] From the perspective of essayism, postcritique advocates like Felski want professors and students to own rather than suppress their enthusiasm, to move from the objective or critical essay to the personal and autobiographical.[39]

[36] B. Latour, 'Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern', *Critical Inquiry*, 30:2 (Winter 2004), 225–48; E.K. Sedgwick, 'Paranoid reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you' in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123–51.

[37] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, p. 17.

[38] R. Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

[39] Perhaps inevitably, Felski's polemic could be charged with engaging in the sort of suspicious reading that it denounces – in this case, scepticism about scepticism itself, a critique of critique. Inevitably, the polemical genre, for its seductive syntheses and authoritative summaries, can erase distinctions and underplay the profoundly anti-critical and creative aspects of writers like Barthes and Derrida. Nonetheless, her depiction of the knowing and

Such attempts to bridge creative, theoretical, and critical writing are not new. 'Fictocriticism' and the 'paraliterary' approaches have been identified as subgenres of literary criticism since the 1990s. But a number of shifts in recent years have given new energy to these developments, including the growth of creative writing programmes (often within English departments) in universities. We have seen a flourishing of 'creative criticism', sometimes understood as a practice of formally inventive critical writing, for which the essays of Barthes, Derrida, Cixous, and the continental critics point the way.[40] The first creative writing courses began in the UK at the undergraduate level in the 1990s at the same time as English was entering its post-theoretical phase. The suspicion of aesthetic evaluation that had marked post-structuralism and cultural materialism was ill-suited to the creative writing workshop, where the art of judgment was practised. A new form of essayistic writing has developed in these classes, a self-reflective writing journal that owns the first-person voice and its artistic possibilities. The term 'creative-critical' has emerged in many programmes in the UK, including a PhD at University College London that overtly sets out to test the limits of critical writing as determined by academic convention.[41] Alongside these developments, we can see a new experimental or personal mode of criticism beginning to appear.[42]

Many reasons can be adduced for the efforts of some institutions to accommodate new modes of essayism: the post-critical turn in the humanities, the explosive success of creative writing programmes over the last thirty years, the surge of literary essay writing that bridges academic and non-academic forums, and the development of publishers to cater to such writing (Fitzcarraldo Editions and Reaktion Books are examples in the UK). Perhaps above all we should rank the pullulation of various modes of essayistic writing on the Internet, on blogs, forums, and review sites, where personal impressions and self-interruption pervade. It might be troubling to acknowledge, but the flourishing of the essay since the turn of the

cynical critic, ever eager to expose the nefarious ideologies and faux numinosity in the literary tradition, was not difficult to recognise as a type, one that for all his professed iconoclasm has hardened into a sort of orthodoxy. For more on this idea, see R. McDonald, 'Critique and anti-critique', *Textual Practice*, 32:3 (2018), 365–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1442400 (accessed 1 August 2023).

[40] C. Connors, 'Creative criticism: a histori-manifesto' in Goh (ed.), *French Thought and Literary Theory*, pp. 46–62.

[41] Ibid., p. 48.

[42] See, e.g., S. Chiyaha et al., *The Ferrante Letters: An Experiment in Collective Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

millennium may stem from the undermining and precarity of the institutional humanities. Theory, as manifest in the essay form, facilitated critique and a suspicious hermeneutic, while also assuaging pedagogical exigencies. That critical spirit has now lost its confidence in literary studies, partly because of the decline in the prestige of the humanities and partly because of a surge in attention towards first-person, non-fiction writing. That return, in its own way, provokes a recursion and a genealogy, which results, belatedly, in the academic meta-essay and reconsideration of the genre inside and outside the university, as the current volume attests.

45

The Essay in the Career of the Contemporary British Novelist

MARTIN PAUL EVE

Essay writing is a paratextual method by which authors place themselves within literary lineages. As Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy note, the history of the essay form has reflexivity and citation at its core.[1] It is a mode in which authors jostle alongside and cite one another. In this sense, essay writing for the contemporary novelist becomes a way to signal a kind of 'literariness'.[2] For John Mullan, in the fictive space, literariness is 'a clumsy word, but a useful label for the ways in which novels display their attachment to other works of literature', an intertextual technique by which '[b]ooks remember other books'.[3] Chris Baldick ascribes such 'literariness' to intrinsic 'linguistic and formal properties' of written works.[4] However, such literariness is also a result of publication placement and can be seen in the function of the essay. It is a process in which essay authors 'remember other authors' by reviewing one another and publishing alongside others. Essay placement in serial publications such as *The London Review of Books* (*LRB*) or *The New York Review of Books* (*NYRB*) builds a social network of authorship and affiliation. Such venues provide a space where authors exchange cultural capital and build their careers.

This chapter will show how the essay plays out as a strategy in the career of the contemporary British novelist. Despite 'the various ways in which the essay bristles against academic writing', I argue here that the form has

[1] T. Karshan and K. Murphy, 'Introduction: On the difficulty of introducing a work of this kind' in Karshan and Murphy (eds.), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 17–18. On citation as the core of the essay, see A. Vine's 'Miscellanies, commonplace books, and the essay' and J. Sider Jost's 'The art of criticism: essay as citation', both in this volume (Chs. 3 and 9, respectively).

[2] A term first mooted by R. Jakobson, *Novejšaja Russkaja Poèzija* (Prague: Tipografija Politika, 1921), p. 11.

[3] J. Mullan, *How Novels Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 284.

[4] C. Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

become deeply entwined with models of academic hierarchy and the teaching and research positions that contemporary novelists often take within universities.[5] As I will demonstrate, such hierarchies also play out in the journalistic space of literary networking in which authors review each other and signal their affiliations to a wider public. In this context, the essay can also become a site of polemic controversy that can generate more heat than light. I will finally also show how the essay plays a core role in bolstering the novel against other encroaching media, even when such defences may be preaching to the converted. While one might imagine, in the age of the Internet, that the essay form would have declining cultural significance, I will argue in this chapter that across the axes of 'academia', 'controversy', and 'sophistication' the essay and its networks continue to exert a strong influence on the career of the contemporary British novelist.

The reader should be warned, upfront, that in this chapter I treat the essay sociologically and somewhat cynically. Unlike other chapters of this volume that consider various aspects of how the essay form works, I am examining the work it does in the careers of contemporary British novelists. It is difficult to do adequate justice to the richness of the field of contemporary British novelists who write essays, for from Marina Warner through David Mitchell, Bernadine Evaristo, Julian Barnes, and Ian McEwan, the basic fact is that most contemporary novelists also write essays. The interplay between the essay form and the novel is complex.[6] Clearly, writers such as Hilary Mantel, to whom I will turn more extensively shortly, write essays about the topics that appear in their own fiction. Mantel also, for example, wrote a diary for the *LRB* in which she talked about her health struggles and how they affected her writing and research. In these senses, the essay form works across different modes, ranging from a kind of persona-generating autofiction, via historical research, through to topical political debate. Unable to cover everything, this chapter attempts to map the effects of these writings on the novelistic careers of their authors.

Essay Writing as a Career Network

We can understand a little about how writers' careers benefit from essay writing by examining one particular type of essay, the discursive book review

[5] Karshan and Murphy, 'Introduction', p. 16.
[6] On this, see J. Davidson's 'The essay and the rise of the novel' in this volume (Ch. 13).

as it has appeared in the last twenty years of the *LRB*.[7] As a longstanding, UK-based literary journal, the *LRB* serves to some extent as a synecdoche for British literary essay networks that transfer and distribute cultural cachet. However, it also has its idiosyncrasies. Initially inserted into *The New York Review of Books*, the *LRB* grew from the period of strike lockouts that knocked *The Times Literary Supplement* temporarily out of circulation in the late 1970s.[8] It is 'broadly leftish' in political terms and celebrates the idea of free debate.[9] The paper worked at its inception on the principles of subjective reviewing practices (i.e., a purely objective book review was impossible) and against deconstructive literary theory, although this stance has changed substantially over its history.[10] Finally, it is known both for the formative influence of Frank Kermode on its style and for the intensive editing of its longest-standing editor and founder, Mary-Kay Wilmers.[11] The *LRB* thus provides an excellent case study of how essay writers connect themselves to other writers in order to determine social standing.

Broadly speaking, *LRB* reviewers and reviewees are of three different types.[12] The first category consists of authors who are reviewed but never review. Zadie Smith, for instance, falls into this category (she has never written for the *LRB*). The second is a category of occasional reviewers, loosely grouped in the network, who sit outside lengthy chains of mutual reviewers. Tom McCarthy, for example, falls into this second category; the people McCarthy reviews (Jean-Philippe Toussaint and Steven Hall) have themselves never reviewed for the *LRB*. Finally, in the third category are reviewer-novelists who form part of elaborate chains of reviews that form the dense interconnected core of the network. Hilary Mantel falls at the lower end of this group: in volume 31 no. 18 of the *LRB* she reviewed Eamon

[7] To do this, I wrote a scraper that extracts these reviews for analysis. See M.P. Eve, 'London Review of Books dataset', *MartinPaulEve/LRB*, 2021, https://github.com/MartinPaulEve/LRB (accessed 2 August 2023).

[8] S. Kinchin-Smith, 'Intent' and M.K. Wilmers, 'Difficulties' in S. Kinchin-Smith (ed.), *London Review of Books: An Incomplete History* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019), pp. 4 and 26, respectively.

[9] Kinchin-Smith, 'I shall not' and 'Dancing with dogma' in Kinchin-Smith (ed.), *London Review of Books*, pp. 32–3 and 106–7.

[10] K. Miller, 'Letter to Frank Kermode' and P. Myerscough, 'New-fangled foreign nonsense' in Kinchin-Smith (ed.), *London Review of Books*, pp. 56–7 and 74–5, respectively.

[11] D. Soar, '"Sly Sir Frank"' in Kinchin-Smith (ed.), *London Review of Books*, p. 157. Wilmers's influence on the publication has been substantial. She was wholly responsible for its editorial policies and directions over a multi-decade tenancy.

[12] The following section, including Fig. 45.1 and Table 45.1, is adapted from M.P. Eve, 'The social network of the London Review of Books' (posted 22 February 2021), https://eve.gd/2021/02/22/the-social-network-of-the-london-review-of-books/ (accessed 17 August 2023).

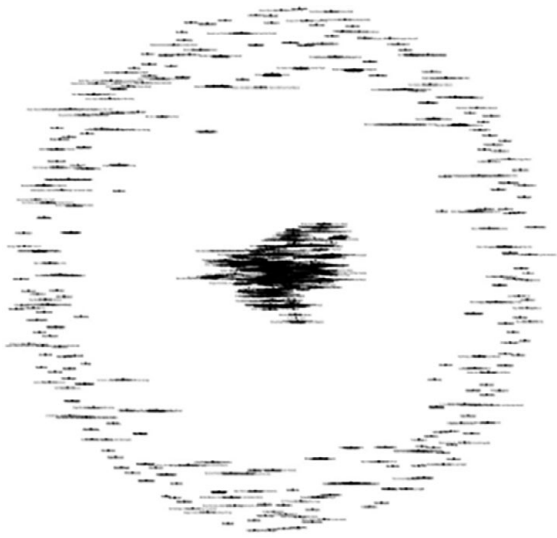

Figure 45.1. The contributor network of *The London Review of Books*. Digital art by Martin Paul Eve.

Duffy, who in volume 31 no. 14 reviewed Keith Thomas, who in volume 33 no. 10 reviewed Alexandra Walsham, who in volume 34 no. 13 reviewed John Cooper. At the far end of the spectrum in this category is the Scottish novelist Andrew O'Hagan, an editor of the *LRB*, who is often involved in chains of up to twenty reviewers. Of course, authors can have connections with one another outside of the rubric of a single publication. It is also true that network centrality does not correlate well with differences in literary prestige. Authors can have prestige without being central in the *LRB* network. Nonetheless, some authors are well connected and some are not. Figure 45.1 gives a bird's-eye view of the network, revealing the 'inner circle' formulation for this serial.

While the distance renders the authors' names illegible, it allows us to see the dense central cluster of names that shows figures woven into tight review networks. Those at the edge form the archipelagos of one-off, disconnected reviews. This tight-knit inner sanctum of the *LRB* implies a nepotistic culture of authors mutually reviewing each other's books. Indeed, it is possible to find various connecting pathways between reviewers: X reviewed Y, who reviewed Z, who reviewed X. In some cases, the reciprocity is direct. Consider, for instance, that in volume 22 no. 5 J. Arch Getty reviewed

Sheila Fitzpatrick, who then, in volume 36 no. 6, reviewed Getty. These most closely woven patterns of tit-for-tat do not involve novelists. They tend to be historians, though they have, from time to time, involved poets, such as when in volume 23 no. 21 David Wheatley reviewed Denis Donoghue, who in turn, in volume 27 no. 6, reviewed Wheatley. Yet, novelists are often only slightly removed from these directly looping chains. Julian Barnes, for example, in volume 37 no. 15 reviewed Julian Bell, who in volume 41 no. 3 reviewed T.J. Clark, who in volume 27 no. 18 reviewed Malcolm Bull, who had reviewed Clark in volume 36 no. 4. As Hilary Mantel has claimed that the *LRB* tries not to send reviewers 'bad books' with which they will not get on, it is likely that these chains of reviews will be mostly positive, or even a circle of backslapping.[13]

Literary review publications are sites of interaction between authors of literary fiction, and such network effects and cliques can be quantified. However, we must recognise that such a bird's-eye view is necessary but insufficient to comprehend the role of the essay in the career of the contemporary British novelist. In order to understand this function better, I now turn to three contemporary novelists and essayists – and their chosen subjects – as case studies in understanding the role of the essay in literary career structures.

Zadie Smith and the Creative-Critical Academic Career

Zadie Smith has written extensive quantities of creative non-fiction, with her first collection, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*, appearing in 2009. She has written mainly for US publications, favouring *The New York Review* and *The New Yorker* and eschewing *The London Review of Books*. So prolific is Smith that her essays span multiple volumes, from *Changing My Mind*, through *Feel Free* (2018), up to her pandemic, lockdown-inspired *Intimations* (2020). Her essays range in subject from the processes of creative writing to contemporary politics, such as the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Notably, Smith is also a tenured professor of creative writing at New York University. Unlike Mantel or McCarthy, the other authors to whom I will shortly turn, Smith is a British-born writer working at an American academic institution and thus writes from a specific critical and

[13] H. Mantel, Introduction to *Mantel Pieces: Royal Bodies and Other Writing from the London Review of Books* (London: Fourth Estate, 2020), p. 3.

geographic vantage point. Hence, she may benefit differently from publication in US cultural magazines than those in the UK.

Given this orientation, it is, therefore, essential to note that many of Smith's essays, published in American venues, have a distinctly British flavour. Consider, for instance, 'North-West London Blues' (2012), an essay that opens with a detailed description of Willesden Green, its imperilled libraries, and immediate environs. We are told of 'the concrete space between the pretty turreted remnants of Willesden Library (1894) and the brutal red-brick beached cruise ship known as Willesden Green Library Centre (1989), a substantial local landmark'.[14] The level of detail here provided about British geography and history is surely overkill in some ways; the bracketed dates for a library centre read almost like parody. Yet the very first section of this essay collection uses the category of 'In the World' to stake such spatial and geographic identity claims as important. Despite her position in the US academy with a US readership, Smith remains very much a *British* contemporary novelist and her essays specifically yield details of the British context.

For Smith, though, the US academy provides a different career structure within which her essay forms sit: the MFA writing programmes that constitute an industry and historical period that Mark McGurl has dubbed the 'Program Era'.[15] Cyril Connolly identified the problem for literary essayists as far back as 1938, when he wrote that 'reviewing is a whole-time job with a half-time salary'.[16] An academic career, by contrast, can help an author plug this deficit. Such an academic career may seem a surprising route to a salary given that enrolments in traditional English ('critical') programmes have been on the decline for approximately a decade in the UK at the time of writing. However, within the same departments, creative writing has seen a growth in numbers. Having high-profile literary writers on a department's academic faculty has become a way to attract students, whether it be Caryl Phillips at Yale, the late Martin Amis at the University of Manchester, or Zadie Smith at NYU.

A network analysis of the *LRB* can, again, inform our understanding of the importance of academia to essay networks. Table 45.1 shows a sample chain.

[14] Z. Smith, 'North-west London blues' in *Feel Free: Essays* (New York: Penguin, 2019), p. 3.
[15] M. McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
[16] C. Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, revised ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 94.

Table 45.1. *A representative chain of reviewer connections in* The London Review of Books. *Digital artwork by Martin Paul Eve*

Reviewer	Reviewee	Volume / Issue	Role
Andrew O'Hagan	Neal Ascherson	24 / 21	Novelist
Neal Ascherson	Jonathan Rée	42 / 15	Journalist
Jonathan Rée	Steven Connor	23 / 9	Freelance
Steven Connor	Marina Warner	34 / 6	Academic
Marina Warner	Thomas Laqueur	39 / 16	Academic / Novelist
Thomas Laqueur	Christopher Clark	35 / 23	Academic
Christopher Clark	Margaret MacMillan	35 / 16	Academic
Margaret MacMillan	Adam Tooze	37 / 3	Academic
Adam Tooze	Paul Blustein	42 / 15	Academic

The preponderance of academics in this random sample of a long chain could be proof, again, that the academy usually ends up talking to itself. However, it is also an indication of the academy's role in the ongoing discussions within the *LRB*. The academy here seems to serve as a 'glue' of sorts, adhering different fields to one another within the career network in which novelists are enmeshed. If a contemporary Republic of Letters still exists in the digital age, academia continues to play the prominent role that it assumed in the later twentieth century.[17]

Smith feels anxiety about her academic role. She writes that she is 'not a real professor' and worries about teaching in an MFA programme while having 'no MFA' and 'no PhD' herself.[18] It is notable, though, that the roles are not full time for many authors who hold such academic posts; they serve as an appendage to or support for their creative writing. For Smith and others in her position, essays seem to act as the critical backbone that legitimates creative practice within the academy. However, she nonetheless admits the impossibility of juggling her attempts simultaneously to 'write a novel, teach class, bring up a kid and produce a regular column'.[19] Academia offers only a partial solution to having insufficient time to write novels and essays.

[17] For more on this, see J.J. McGann, *A New Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
[18] Z. Smith, Foreword to *Feel Free*, p. xi.
[19] Z. Smith, 'The *Harper's* columns' in *Feel Free*, p. 332.

Hilary Mantel's Controversies and Politics

Essays are also the foremost vehicles used by contemporary novelists to generate controversy and thereby stoke conversation about their works. Among the most prominent contemporary British novelists whose career used the essay as a vehicle for controversy was Hilary Mantel. Mantel is best known for her Wolf Hall trilogy of Tudor historical fiction (2009, 2012, 2020). Mantel's career in essays began in the late 1980s, when she wrote for *The Literary Review* and *The London Magazine*, both poorly paying gigs that she took for reasons of reputational gain.[20] However, her essayistic career accelerated dramatically in 1987, when she was invited to write for *The London Review of Books*, shortly after the publication of her second novel, *Vacant Possession* (1986). Like many of those of her contemporaries, Mantel's essays took the form of discursive book reviews. This allowed Mantel to range widely in her subject matter while, ostensibly, reviewing a book.

Mantel's first review for the *LRB* is instructive in understanding her focus. In this first piece, 'No Place for Journalists' (1987), Mantel reviewed two books covering the censorious political regimes of Saudi Arabia and China. This early essay sets the tone for a tie-in with Mantel's generic stylings. For, first, she historicised her review of these contemporary commentaries, noting how '[i]n the past, other Arabs regarded the desert people as backward and deprived'; at the same time, she noted that 'the bedouin harboured a conviction of moral and racial superiority'.[21] Such historicisation allowed Mantel to paint herself as a knowledgeable and serious researching historian (which she was), even though her novels are fictive and her academic background was in law, not history. Mantel also used this first *LRB* piece to highlight an interest in the worldwide position of women. For instance, Mantel remarked on how the 'Saudis manifest a terrible fear of women's sexuality', although she also notes that 'life for Saudi women has improved in many ways'.[22] This early work set the scene for Mantel's career-long commitment to the essay form. In that, it neatly encapsulates her areas of knowledge. She had lived in Saudi Arabia for some time and so knew of its cultures, as explored, for example, in 'Bookcase Shopping in Jeddah' (1989). Furthermore, she had particular expertise in Tudor

[20] Mantel, Introduction to *Mantel Pieces*, p. 1.
[21] H. Mantel, 'No place for journalists', *London Review of Books*, 9:17 (1 October 1987), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v09/n17/hilary-mantel/no-place-for-journalists (accessed 2 August 2023). No page numbers in electronic issues, as indicated below by n.p.; where I have had access to print issues, page numbers are given.
[22] Ibid.

and French revolutionary history (for example, 'On Marie-Antoinette', 1999). Finally, she often brought a personal aspect into her essay writing (for example, 'Meeting my Stepfather', 2003).[23]

The formal characteristics of Mantel's non-fictional essays reflect the historiography of her fictional writing. For instance, in addition to publishing a 'Diary' in the *LRB*, Mantel was the author of an autobiographical memoir, *Giving Up the Ghost* (2003). This text covers her family background and the import of a religious upbringing for her writing. As Joseph Brooker has noted, Mantel writes her autobiography in a literary style with non-linear narration, a feature also seen in the autobiographies of Jeanette Winterson and John McGahern, among others. Brooker examines, for instance, how Mantel's memoir begins at the end, on '12 August 2000'. This proleptic distortion continues into the first chapter, which meditates 'on the art of auto-biography from the present'.[24] Hence, Mantel's autobiographical essay work was in some ways a historiographic meditation. The techniques of writing historical fiction were deployed as much in her essayistic writing about her own history as in her writing about great historical figures. Mantel, in other words, used the essay form to position herself as a reflexive historiographic thinker, a point of crucial import for her fiction and for her reputation.

The historiographic elements of Mantel's essays and fiction demonstrate an affiliation with formal historical research. Mantel sat within the crossover space of academic historians in the *LRB* network. However, she also stoked controversy with her non-fiction writings. Mantel's 2013 essay in the *LRB*, 'Royal Bodies', for instance, claimed that the Duchess of Cambridge was becoming 'a shop-window mannequin, with no personality of her own, entirely defined by what she wore'.[25] Mantel's contextual hook for this piece was Marie Antoinette's fashion: 'a woman eaten alive by her frocks', who was 'transfixed by appearances, stigmatised by her fashion choices'.[26] Nonetheless, Britain's ardently royalist tabloid press stirred up fury over this piece, with *The Daily Mail* leading the charge and bringing the prime minister into the critical fray.[27]

[23] Mantel, Introduction to *Mantel Pieces*, p. 4.
[24] J. Brooker, 'Around 2000: memoir as literature' in A. Smyth (ed.), *A History of English Autobiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 378.
[25] H. Mantel, 'Royal bodies', *London Review of Books*, 35:4 (21 February 2013), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v35/n04/hilary-mantel/royal-bodies (accessed 2 August 2023), n.p.
[26] Ibid.
[27] F. Infante and R. English, 'Kate puts her baby bump on parade as prime minister mauls best-selling author Hilary Mantel over "plastic princess made for breeding" jibe', *Daily Mail* (18 February 2013), www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2280780 (accessed 2 August 2023).

Mantel hardly shied away from political controversy. As noted in the introduction to her wittily titled anthology, *Mantel Pieces* (2020), she believed that 'a literary journal must [also] be a political journal', as literary writers cannot simply 'detach from larger realities'.[28] Mantel wove this politicised sentiment through her writings, both in essay and fictional forms. Indeed, while Mantel called her controversial 'Royal Bodies' essay a piece in a 'category of one' (a total outsider to her usual fare) this is somewhat disingenuous. She was known and fostered a career as a 'rebellious' writer, one who also managed to enrage Conservative readers with her fictional story about an assassination of Margaret Thatcher.[29] As part of the promotional campaign, *The Guardian* interviewed Mantel about this work, and she expressed a still 'boiling detestation' for Thatcher. By this point, it seems that Mantel was enjoying stoking the ire of 'the great outraged'.[30]

Nevertheless, the career implications of fostering scandal – particularly in this essayistic vein – cannot be overlooked. As James F. English has detailed, in the world of literary prizes, scandal serves only to further the reputation of any particular prize. He writes that scandal, or the threat and promise of scandal, is constitutive of prizes as we know them.[31] While most such scandals are, say, the 'scandals' of prize juries overlooking supposedly worthy figures, the scandalising behaviour of authors can be highly productive for cultural prizes.[32] I am here neither judging Mantel's expertise nor casting doubt on the value of her fiction. I am merely pointing to how her controversy-generating essays fed into networks of prize culture that thrive on scandal. Whether intentional or not, since her ascent to these heights of cultural prize-winning, Mantel's reputation and presence has only been boosted by such prominent provocative and scandalous essay material.

[28] Mantel, Introduction to *Mantel Pieces*, p. 5. For an account of the imbrication of feminist politics and the literary essay, see Rebecca Rainof's discussion in 'A room of one's own: the New Woman and the essay' in this volume (Ch. 34).

[29] V. Bennett, 'Subjectivity in process: writing and the I in *Giving Up the Ghost* and *Ink in the Blood*' in E. Pollard and G. Carpenter (eds.), *Hilary Mantel: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 73; H. Mantel, *The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Fourth Estate, 2015).

[30] D. Barr, 'Hilary Mantel on Margaret Thatcher: "I can still feel that boiling detestation"' (interview), *Guardian* (19 September 2014), www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/19/hilary-mantel-interview-short-story-assassination-margaret-thatcher (accessed 2 August 2023).

[31] J.F. English, 'Winning the culture game: prizes, awards, and the rules of art', *New Literary History*, 33:1 (2002), 113.

[32] J.F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 227–8.

Tom McCarthy's Erudite Sophistication

While Hilary Mantel used her non-fiction to bolster her reputation for broad historical knowledge while cultivating some level of literary scandal, another school of contemporary British writers uses the essay to develop affiliations with highbrow, difficult fiction, and with literary theory. The work of Tom McCarthy exemplifies this trend. McCarthy is a London-based writer of literary fiction best known for the three novels *Remainder* (2005), *C* (2010), and *Satin Island* (2015), the latter two of which were both shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.[33] McCarthy is also the author of several lesser-known pieces, notably *Men in Space* (2007) and a work of literary criticism, *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* (2006).

McCarthy is one of those whom Mantel might have described as taking 'comfort from vogues in literary criticism' (she painted herself as 'a non-combatant' in the theory-wars).[34] Indeed, McCarthy uses the essay form to position himself as a popular literary critic who writes on difficult fiction and theory. For example, he wrote on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) in the *London Review of Books* in 2014. He wrote on Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *Running Away* (2009) when his novel *C* was published. He wrote on Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007) to coincide with *Men in Space*.[35] He cites Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Slavoj Žižek, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, and Julia Kristeva with great enthusiasm, sometimes within the same breath.[36] Such an affiliation with theory and philosophy appears part of a calculated strategy. McCarthy usually publishes around the times when his fiction is released. For example, the sudden outpouring of *LRB* pieces in mid-to-late 2014, after a four-year hiatus, might appear, to the

[33] This section on Tom McCarthy was originally published in M.P. Eve, *Literature Against Criticism: University English and Contemporary Fiction in Conflict* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2016), pp. 60–3.

[34] H. Mantel, 'Women in pain: American marriage' in *Mantel Pieces*, p. 12; Mantel, Introduction to *Mantel Pieces*, p. 3.

[35] T. McCarthy, '"Ulysses" and its wake', *London Review of Books*, 32 (19 June 2014), 39–41; 'Writing machines', *London Review of Books* (18 December 2014), 21–2; 'Stabbing the olive', *London Review of Books*, 3 (11 February 2010), www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v32/n03/tom-mccarthy/stabbing-the-olive (accessed 2 August 2023), n.p.; 'Straight to the multiplex: Steven Hall's "The Royal Shark Texts"', *London Review of Books* (1 November 2007), 33–4.

[36] McCarthy, '"Ulysses" and its wake' and 'Stabbing the olive'; and, from T. McCarthy's collected essays: 'Get real, or what jellyfish have to tell us about literature'; *'Tristram Shandy*: on balls and planes'; 'The prosthetic imagination of David Lynch'; 'From feedback to reflux: Kafka's cybernetics of revolt'; 'On dodgem jockeys'; and 'Kathy Acker's infidel heteroglossia': in *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish: Essays* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), pp. 72, 91, 147, 158, 206, 260, respectively.

cynically minded, to coincide eerily with the publication of *Satin Island*. McCarthy has not published a novel since 2015. Likewise, he has written nothing new for *The London Review of Books* since that time.

It is not just a general erudition that is put to the uses of self-promotion here. McCarthy's populist criticism, usually on highbrow literary fiction, links his non-academic authorial presence with the high literature of the modernist and postmodernist schools favoured on university syllabi. This aspect can be seen in his *Guardian* article of 2015, again on Joyce.[37] McCarthy's literary criticism seems designed to associate his fiction writing with the giants of the modernist period and the theorists of the post-structuralist schools. He also appears to be attempting to vie with university-based academic literary critics for cultural sophistication and the authority to remark on these forms. Importantly, McCarthy's affiliation with modernist and postmodernist canons is neither straightforwardly one of lineage nor homage. Yet the connection generates his authorial presence with a prefabricated canon lineage behind him. Such a strategy is not unique to McCarthy. It almost certainly applies to other public intellectuals who deploy these marketing techniques, such as Will Self.[38]

Indeed, Self is a notorious case. Like many years, 2018 saw the publication of a dire warning from this novelist.[39] Echoing the same remarks that he made twice previously in 2014, Self cautioned that the novel was a dying art form, with books and bookshelves heading the way of the dinosaur.[40] For Self, it appears important to situate himself within a lineage of Cassandras. Hence he proclaims that the literary novel 'is absolutely doomed to become a marginal cultural form, along with easel painting and the classical symphony'.[41] Many commentators noted that it was odd for a contemporary

[37] T. McCarthy, 'The death of writing – if James Joyce were alive today he'd be working for Google', *Guardian* (7 May 2015), www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/07/tom-mccarthy-death-writing-james-joyce-working-google (accessed 2 August 2023).

[38] For more on McCarthy and modernism, see J. Nieland, 'Dirty media: Tom McCarthy and the afterlife of modernism', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 58:3 (2012), 569–99; M.P. Eve, 'Structures, signposts and plays: modernist anxieties and postmodern influences in Tom McCarthy's *C*' in D. Duncan (ed.), *Tom McCarthy: Critical Essays* (London: Gylphi, 2016), pp. 181–200.

[39] A. Clark, 'Will Self: "The novel is absolutely doomed"' (interview), *Guardian* (17 March 2018), www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/17/will-self-the-books-interview-alex-clark-phone-memoir (accessed 2 August 2023).

[40] W. Self, 'The novel is dead (this time it's for real)', *Guardian* (2 May 2014), www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/02/will-self-novel-dead-literary-fiction, and 'The death of the shelf', *Prospect Magazine* (21 May 2014), www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/essays/46354/the-death-of-the-shelf (both accessed 2 August 2023).

[41] Clark, 'Will Self'.

novelist to predict the death of a medium to which he was so indebted and, indeed, committed. Why would an author of novels write such a performative and potentially self-fulfilling prophecy?

In some ways, though, following my argument about McCarthy, Self's stratagem is clear: this cluster of doom-mongering is bunched around the publication of his three novels *Umbrella* (2012), *Shark* (2014), and *Phone* (2017). Self combines an air of controversy, as per Mantel, with a claim to theoretical sophistication, as per McCarthy, following in the footsteps of Barthes and others with claims of the death of the author.[42] Yet not everyone was swayed. Self's son, Luther, took to Twitter in order to air some family grievances. This was in some ways fair. After all, Self had used his children as the proverbial canaries in the 'culture-mine' in a 2014 essay. The tenor of the retort, though, was brutal. Responding to the 2018 *Guardian* piece, Luther Self tweeted: 'haha that is literally my dad, the other day he got angry at me for saying comics were as good as novels . . . he's an idiot'.[43] Going further than this, though, Luther also tweeted that 'he's a novelist who hasn't sold any of his last two books so he assumes the whole medium is dying'.

In this claimed tension between individual book sales and the future of an entire media form lies the challenge for Self's self-situation. For there is a political economy at work in Self's 2018 essay. This essay is designed to create an air of exclusivity and refinement that is predicated on a form of cultural conservatism with regard to literary fiction and the material artefact of 'the book'. The essay knowingly beckons to a readership who are *already persuaded* of the need for the future of the book and interpellates them as co-defenders against the barbarism of new media forms that are, supposedly, slowly displacing 'real' reading.[44] In other words, Self fabricates a fictive set of other, dangerous, and new (but not to say 'novel') media forms that threaten the supposed place of literary fiction; the essays become a career move in which Self proclaims himself the defender of high culture. This essay does so by being published in a venue devoted to the art form described as dying, alongside other authors. Yet who reads the books section in *The Guardian* newspaper, or *The London Review of Books*, except those already

[42] R. Barthes, 'The death of the author' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (London: Fontana, 1987), pp. 142–8; Self, 'Death of the shelf', and S. Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

[43] I here rely on screenshots of tweets by Luther Self that he subsequently deleted and hence whose URLs are no longer active.

[44] See J.L. Panko, *Out of Print: Mediating Information in the Novel and the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), pp. 16–18.

persuaded of the merit of books? Self is also, importantly, Professor of Modern Thought at Brunel University London, alongside Evaristo, who holds a similar role at this institution. This is a job that provides him with some financial income in exchange for teaching a course on psychogeography and contributing his creative writing to the department's Research Excellence Framework. In other words, Self's strategies combine all of the aspects that I have covered in this chapter.

Nevertheless, to return to McCarthy, his identity projection becomes, through the essay, that of the figure who is not an academic but who can demonstrably play that game, a continuation of the modernist legacy of the 'author-critics' such as T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Ezra Pound.[45] For an author who wishes to be viewed as a proto-neomodernist, what could be a better technique to forge such a link than to write essays on high-modernist fiction? Perhaps most importantly, though, when considering career structures, McCarthy is significant for considering who writes about whom. Famously, to come full circle back to my first case study, Zadie Smith – herself the winner of the Whitbread First Novel Award, the Guardian First Book Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the Commonwealth Writers' First Book Award, the Orange Prize for Fiction, and an author twice shortlisted for the Man Booker – wrote an essay about McCarthy in 2001 entitled 'Two Paths for the Novel'.[46] In this work, which arguably did more for McCarthy's career than any of his own essays, Smith canonised McCarthy, calling *Remainder* 'an alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward' (positing a realist/anti-realist binary that McCarthy has himself disowned).[47] Hence, once again, we return to the ways in which authors' reviews of one another spread prestige and canonicity through the viral networks of serial essays and reviews.

As we have seen, networking, controversy, and academia lock together in the essay form, steadily contributing to the career structures of the contemporary novelists who write them. Zadie Smith, Hilary Mantel, and Tom McCarthy make up the case studies here, but the overarching categories of 'academia', 'controversy', and theoretical 'sophistication' to which I have assigned these writers could be used to consider a far broader range of authors, from China Miéville to Sarah Hall. While there is continued debate

[45] R. McDonald, *The Death of the Critic* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 81.
[46] Z. Smith, 'Two paths for the novel', *New York Review of Books* (20 November 2008), www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/11/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/ (accessed 2 August 2023).
[47] D. Haglund, 'The long shadow of "Two paths for the novel"', *New Yorker* (27 February 2015), www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner (accessed 2 August 2023).

over the ongoing death of the novel – despite the fact that the form has 'been proclaimed dead or dying for nearly as long as it has been alive' – the contemporary essay works to keep the category alive and remains crucial in the career of the contemporary British novelist.[48]

[48] K. Fitzpatrick, 'The exhaustion of literature: novels, computers, and the threat of obsolescence', *Contemporary Literature*, 43:3 (2002), 519.

46

Blogging in Britain: Essays in the Digital Age

JOSHUA PUGH

The essay in our digital age remains as rich and varied as ever, and as hard to grasp in its entirety. Harder, perhaps, since the digital age is an age of unprecedented 'abundance', in which technological change has vastly increased the pace at which new writing is published.[1] Anyone can now self-publish a book, whether print-on-demand or direct to Amazon's Kindle. Anyone, too, can self-publish an essay – especially if, like everyone else, they use the Internet. In previous centuries, publishing was an industry regulated by expert gatekeepers like editors and literary agents. In many ways it remains so, but in others it has changed forever. For untold numbers of online writers, 'publish' is just a button you push, a procedure as quick as a click. This cultural shift has seen professional writers and readers increasingly eclipsed by 'amateurs', and literary institutions by online networks. Most of the best twentieth-century essays were institutional products, shaped by periodicals, publishing houses, and, later, writing programmes, home to their own emerging genre: 'creative non-fiction'. Today these institutions persist, but they are only part of the flourishing field of the essay.

The literary-critical essay, the focus of this chapter, has long been split between two professions: journalism and academe, Grub Street and the ivory tower. Over time, the Internet has reproduced – and reimagined – these familiar traditions. But it has also created its own. Anyone reading this will likely have read an online, open-access scholarly journal, an online magazine like the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, or a Substack newsletter. Before all such digital media, however, there were blogs. In the early 2000s, blogs provided the main source of online access to essays; looking back, they remain the place where digital essays feel most authentically essayistic. Exploratory,

[1] On the 'problem of abundance' in contemporary literary production, see M. Wilkens, 'Contemporary fiction by the numbers', *Post45* (11 March 2011), www.post45.org/2011/03/contemporary-fiction-by-the-numbers/ (accessed 2 August 2023).

experimental, unprofessional, rough-around-the-edges: blogs gave writers a space to express what the novelist and philosopher Lars Iyer calls their 'legitimate strangeness'.[2] This chapter reflects on the early twenty-first-century heyday of blogging, reading the blog as a literary form with its own creative 'affordances', its own possibilities, and its own still-unacknowledged legacies.[3] A comprehensive history of blogging in Britain has yet to be written, but this chapter offers an essay towards one.

The Blog Era?

The term 'blog', short for 'weblog', dates from the early years of the Internet. In 1997, computer programmer and James Joyce aficionado John Barger began 'logging the web', compiling a daily list of links to online articles on literature, the arts, and technology.[4] Weblogs quickly caught on, and before long their content expanded from external links to personal commentary, creating an online hybrid of annotated bibliography and diary. 'Weblog' was shortened to 'blog' by Peter Merholz in 1999, a year that also saw the launch of the first blogging platforms, Blogger and LiveJournal, followed in 2003 by WordPress and TypePad. Thus began the golden age of blogging, and with it, a wave of self-published writing on literature, politics, music, and more. But blogs, like so many online phenomena, proved evanescent, fading from view almost as soon as they flared into life. By the 2010s, blogs already felt dated, the word itself as uncool and archaic as other early Internet terms: 'the information superhighway'; 'surfing the web'. Their rapid decline has been blamed, with good reason, on the emergence of social media.

Facebook was founded in 2004, swiftly followed by Twitter in 2006; both sites combined aspects of blogging with social networking, wrapped up in flashy, accessible graphics. Moreover, social media supplanted a now largely abandoned technology: RSS feeds.[5] RSS (short, depending on whom one asks, for either 'Rich Site Summary' or 'Really Simple Syndication') had been

[2] L. Iyer, '"Develop your legitimate strangeness": Lars Iyer on the freedom of blogging', *Melville House Blog* (16 June 2011); see https://biblioklept.org/2011/07/15/biblioklept-interviews-novelist-lars-iyer/ (accessed 16 August 2023).

[3] I borrow the term 'affordance' from C. Levine as used in her 'Introduction: The affordances of form' in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[4] D. McCullagh and A. Broache, 'Blogs turn 10 – who's the father?', *CNet News* (20 March 2007), www.news.cnet.com/culture/blogs-turn-10-whos-the-father/ (accessed 2 August 2023).

[5] See S. Gillmor, 'Rest in peace, RSS', *TechCrunch* (5 May 2009), www.techcrunch.com/2009/05/05/rest-in-peace-rss/ (accessed 2 August 2023).

the beating heart of the early blogosphere. Through RSS 'Readers' like Bloglines (2003–11) and later, Google Reader (2005–13), one could subscribe to one's favourite blogs and view them in aggregate, curating a personal feed of daily reading. RSS was the medium through which blogs connected with readers, and with each other – and its demise presaged the end not only of blogging, but also of a vibrant period in Internet history.

The closure of Google Reader in 2013 has been called 'the day the Good Internet died'.[6] The inventors of the Internet had imagined 'an ideal society: decentralised, egalitarian, harmonious, and free'.[7] Inspired by both the hippie counterculture and Cold War technoculture, these pioneers invested utopian hopes in the idea of digital networks. In contrast with analogue broadcast technologies – not to mention the older print ecology – the World Wide Web, claimed Tim Berners-Lee, would be a 'collaborative medium, a place where we [could] all meet and read and write'.[8] Berners-Lee's vision of a two-way, 'read/write' web – as opposed to previous 'read-only' media – took time to become a reality. In the early years, writing and sharing content online required knowledge of HTML code and Internet protocols. Blogs became the first widely adopted, easy to use self-publishing tool, paving the way for today's Internet, in which everyone can become a 'creator' – albeit not with the freedom envisaged by early Silicon Valley idealists.

Since social media came on the scene, online life has radically changed – and with it, human civilisation. Blogs had belonged to a distributed, independent web. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook transformed that web into the property of corporations, four or five of which now control the global flow of information. From bohemia to Big Tech; from amateurism to algorithms; from the dream of 'participatory culture' to the nightmare of 'surveillance capitalism': in less than half a century, the Internet age has already embodied each of these extreme possibilities.[9] Blogs, in this sense, represent an inflection point, a pivot between residual and emergent versions of digital culture. Chronicling the rise of creative writing in the late twentieth century, Mark McGurl has dubbed that period the 'Program Era', an epoch that saw writing programmes become the key drivers of literary

[6] K. Baker, 'The day the good Internet died', *The Ringer* (21 July 2021), www.theringer.com/2021/7/21/22586870/google-reader-ode-end-of-the-good-internet (accessed 2 August 2023).
[7] F. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 1.
[8] T. Berners-Lee, quoted in C. Silver, 'What is Web 3.0?' (6 January 2020), www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/01/06/what-is-web-3-0/ (accessed 16 August 2023).
[9] See S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

production.[10] Unlike the Program Era, the brief, already outmoded Blog Era is of note precisely because it is over. Blogging was a bubble that burst, a paradigm shift that did not pan out, but that reflects, in its obsolescence, a different image of online life.

Book Blogging

British literary blogging – or 'book blogging', as it was more commonly known – took off in the early 2000s, with an efflorescence of independent personal websites including (in a list that is far from exhaustive) Mark Thwaite's *ReadySteadyBook*, John Self's *Asylum*, Stephen Mitchelmore's *This Space* (on which more below), Max Cairnduff's *Pechorin's Journal*, Lynne Hatwell's *Dovegreyreader Scribbles*, Andrew Gallix's *Buzzwords* (a precursor to today's *3:AM Magazine*), and *Book World* (whose posts were simply signed 'Sandra'). Librarians, lawyers, civil servants, community nurses: these pioneering book bloggers were neither journalists nor academics but impassioned amateurs, using the new blogging platforms (primarily, Blogger, WordPress, and TypePad) to carve out a distinctive niche in British literary culture. Writing, for them, was not paid labour, nor was it constrained by the conventions of newspaper reviews or scholarly articles. The burgeoning literary blogosphere spanned a broad spectrum of critical practice. Some book bloggers saw themselves as hobbyists, others as avant-garde cultural activists. Some proselytised for personal canons, others simply diarised their reading lives – *Book World* bore the modest strapline, 'One woman's attempt to read what's worth reading and say something about it along the way'.[11]

But despite their apparent marginality, bloggers quickly caught mainstream attention. Unlike their pre-digital forebears, their rising prominence could even be measured precisely, in pageviews. By 2006, the largest British literary blog, Thwaite's *ReadySteadyBook*, was tracking 3,000 visitors per day – a statistic that earned him an honourable mention in *The Observer*'s list of the 'top 50 players in the world of books'.[12] This bottom-up growth in blog readership coincided with wider shifts in the publishing landscape. Newspaper book review sections had long been shrinking and folding, and

[10] M. McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[11] 'Sandra', *Book World*, accessed via Internet Archive WayBack Machine, www.web.archive.org.

[12] R. McCrum, 'Our top 50 players in the world of books', *Observer* (5 March 2006), www.theguardian.com/books/2006/mar/05/features.review (accessed 2 August 2023).

the credit crunch of 2008 spurred further downsizing. That year, both *Time Out* and *The Daily Telegraph* made their literary editors redundant. Meanwhile, book publishers were reallocating their own decreasing marketing budgets. Traditional print advertising largely gave way to 'online outreach', with publicists sending review copies to mailing lists of the hottest bloggers.[13] Some publishers outsourced not only publicity but also editorial discovery, acquiring obscure books that had blown up on the blogosphere. Before long, blogs were enmeshed in the book trade's 'web of collective belief', sociologist John Thompson's term for the buzz and hype from which successful sales are woven.[14] Such was the economic backdrop against which Britain's premier publishing industry periodical, *The Bookseller*, declared in 2010 that 'Indie Literary Sites' were 'Coming of Age'.[15]

But the scene had also been set for a backlash. Print journalists were understandably anxious; among them was newspaper stalwart Sir Peter Stothard, editor from 2002 to 2016 of *The Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*), a paper that remains, alongside *The London Review of Books* (*LRB*), one of the last bastions of professional literary journalism in Britain. In 2012, Stothard chaired the UK's preeminent literary prize, the Man Booker, and used his position to lament the state of book reviewing. Critical standards, he claimed, were declining – and blogs were to blame. 'It is wonderful that there are so many blogs and websites devoted to books', he told *The Independent*, 'but to be a critic is to be importantly different than those sharing their own taste . . . not everyone's opinion is worth the same.'[16] Real critics were readers whose tastes had been refined into expert judgments – worth publishing, and worth paying for. Bloggers, by contrast, belonged to the bookish masses that John Guillory has labelled 'lay readers', and Merve Emre, more provocatively, 'bad readers'.[17] Fickle, irrational, and lacking in critical acumen, bloggers, for Stothard, had too much in common with the common reader. Moreover, he reasoned, the blogosphere's bad readers were 'bad for readers'; if publishers catered to their untrained tastes, the marketplace would become flooded

[13] Thompson includes a useful breakdown of one US imprint's marketing budget circa 2006/2008, in J. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 252.

[14] Ibid., p. 194.

[15] G. Neil, 'Indie literary sites start coming of age', *Bookseller* (8 October 2010), www.thebookseller.com/news/indie-literary-sites-start-coming-age (accessed 2 August 2023).

[16] N. Clark, 'The bionic book worm', *Independent* (26 September 2012), www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/the-bionic-book-worm-8168123.html (accessed 2 August 2023).

[17] See J. Guillory, 'How scholars read', *ADE Bulletin*, 146 (Fall 2008), 8–17; M. Emre, *Paraliterary: The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

with more and more bad books.[18] As usual, then (in what Marshall McLuhan famously dubbed the 'rear view mirror effect'), a new technology became enmired in old dichotomies.[19] Gatekeepers of taste versus the tasteless barbarians at the gates: Stothard's portrayal of critics and bloggers continued a long tradition of pessimistic cultural commentary.[20]

Stothard's depiction of the blogosphere prompted a riposte from John Self, by now not only a prominent blogger but also a regular writer for *The Guardian* – a figure who, with a foot in both camps, could make a more balanced appraisal:

> Anyone can start a blog. Bloggers are not commissioned, not edited, don't have to be good enough to earn money from it. But these are strengths as well as weaknesses: no limitations based on what a literary editor has space for, or a taste for; no need to turn them out at a certain rate to earn a living; and they must earn their own readership, with no support structure.[21]

Bloggers, Self added, practised a 'criticism with personality', giving their readers 'a sense of trust that, in professional circles, only the biggest lit-crit names can attain'.[22] Historically, book reviews in British newspapers had often been published anonymously, a tradition upheld by the *TLS* until 1974. Of course, there had been big-name British critics (Philip Toynbee in *The Observer*; Cyril Connolly in *The Sunday Times*), but their mid-century heyday had faded. Nor, at least by comparison with America, was there a celebrity 'star system' in the less highly salaried UK academy.[23] Bloggers, by contrast, built name recognition not from CV entries or column inches, but from the deeply personal engagement offered to readers by the blog format: its intimacy and continuity, the feeling of watching a life unfolding. The 'trust' elicited by this feeling differed from that cultivated by academics and literary journalists. *Theirs* was a trust buttressed by publication and credentialisation, a trust based on prestige. Sociologists since Pierre Bourdieu have posited

[18] Clark, 'Bionic book worm'.
[19] M. McLuhan and Q. Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (London: Penguin, 1967), pp. 74–5.
[20] The sharpest commentator on this tradition is Stefan Collini; see, e.g., his *Common Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 227.
[21] J. Self, 'Why book bloggers are critical to literary criticism', *Guardian* (26 September 2012), www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2012/sep/26/book-bloggers-literary-criticism-stothard (accessed 2 August 2023).
[22] Ibid.
[23] On the US context, see D. Shumway, 'The star system in literary studies', *PMLA*, 112:1 (1997), 85–100.

prestige as the key currency of the modern literary economy.[24] But bloggers embodied a different form of authority, the primal personal magnetism that Max Weber conceptualised as 'charisma'.[25] Blogging, in this sense, was an early sign of a wider anti-establishment trend. Online charisma has reshaped contemporary culture for better and worse, disrupting hierarchical structures while undermining objective knowledge – democratising but also demoralising the public sphere, stirring the madness of crowds.

The best bloggers, in any case, proved every bit as discerning as professional critics. More so, even, since innovation in UK fiction increasingly came, like bloggers themselves, from the margins. Since the 1950s, publishing had transformed from a cottage to a corporate industry; by 2001, over half of the British book market was controlled by just five media conglomerates: Bertelsmann, Pearson, HarperCollins, Hodder Headline, and Hachette.[26] The 'Big Five' enjoyed privileged access to newspaper reviews, literary prizes, and retail chains. Their premium product, perfectly placed in the sweet spot between profit and prestige, was the 'literary' realist novel, the major success story of British publishing since the 1980s.[27] Bloggers, however, took a different perspective.

In several polemical *ReadySteadyBook* posts, Thwaite railed against what he labelled 'Establishment Literary Fiction'. Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes: Establishment Literary Fiction was book-club fiction, *Guardian* fiction, *Granta* best-young-novelists fiction. 'Each year', Thwaite lamented, 'a flood of Booker-ready novels are declared masterpieces', when they were really just 'the Victorian novel with a few Jamesian knobs on'.[28] Amid this conformity, where was the novelty? Not with the Big Five, book bloggers realised, but with a new wave of small presses: Galley Beggar, And Other Stories, Fitzcarraldo Editions, and others, which had sprung up in the early 2000s, and whose diverse, adventurous books often achieved success via the blogosphere. An early example was Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005), published in a run of 750 copies by the French small press Metronome,

[24] See, for instance, J. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[25] See M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 1111–12.

[26] C. Gasson, *Who Owns Whom in British Book Publishing* (London: Bookseller Publications, 2002), pp. 88–9.

[27] See S. Brouillette, 'The publishing industry and fiction' in B.W. Shaffer et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, 3 vols. (Oxford: J. Wiley & Sons, 2011), vol. 3, pp. 1291–5.

[28] M. Thwaite, 'Responses to Zadie Smith', *ReadySteadyBook* (2008), accessed via Internet Archive WayBack Machine, www.web.archive.org.

and initially championed by online voices like Lee Rourke and Andrew Gallix. Their support propelled the book towards mainstream status – republication, newspaper reviews, film adaptation – and paved the way for a surprising shift in the literary marketplace. After *Remainder*, avant-garde writing was all the rage: from Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) to Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018), the most fashionable fiction was no longer Victorian-with-knobs-on, but self-consciously modernist.

And if bloggers created a climate that helped new writers break through, they too were 'making it new' in a modernist manner by pushing against the generic constraints of the literary-critical essay. In this respect, John Self remarked, 'the greatest tool bloggers have at their disposal is space'.[29] By this, he meant literal space: the infinitely scrollable screen, as opposed to the fixed size (and shrinking number) of newspaper review pages. But space is also a fertile metaphor: space to experiment, space to explore. Such is the space travelled by Stephen Mitchelmore, a veteran book blogger whose *This Space* (2004–) has played a central – if eccentric – role in online literary criticism for nearly two decades.

Possessively, but not implausibly, Mitchelmore claims the title of 'Britain's first book blogger'. He began as a regular writer for the now-defunct online journal *Spike Magazine* (1995–2012), and then collaborated with philosopher Lars Iyer on a group blog, *In Writing* (2002–4), before launching *This Space*. The site takes its name from Mitchelmore's idol Maurice Blanchot, whose preface to *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949) posed the question 'What is the Purpose of Criticism?' and answered:

> Criticism is nothing, but this nothingness is precisely that in which the literary work, silent and invisible, allows itself to be what it is: radiance and discourse, affirmation and presence, speaking seemingly about itself, without faltering, in this void of great quality that it is critical intervention's mission to produce. Critical discourse is this space of resonance within which the unspoken, indefinite reality of the work is momentarily transformed and circumscribed into words. And as such, due to the fact that it claims modestly and obstinately to be nothing, criticism ceases being distinguished from the creative discourse of which it would be the necessary actualization or, metaphorically speaking, the epiphany.[30]

[29] Self, 'Why book bloggers are critical to literary criticism'.
[30] M. Blanchot, *Lautréamont and Sade*, trans. S. Kendall and M. Kendall (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

Criticism as mirage and miracle – emptiness and epiphany. Whether one finds this inspiring or pretentious depends on taste; still, it perfectly captures Mitchelmore's sense of what blogging can do that mainstream critical writing cannot.

A classic *This Space* post, in this respect, is 'Fear of Reading' (2009), an autobiographical account of a road traffic accident – and yet so much more. Opening on the roadside 'in the monochrome sunlight of a January afternoon', Mitchelmore's essay expands to take in the 'glorious and terrifying absurdity' of Egyptian pharaohs, fanatical literary characters, and indeed literature itself. It then plunges bathetically back into the banal facts of the accident, before elaborating a meditation on the 'legacy of traumatic brain injury', amnesia, and above all the author's enduring 'fascination with books'.[31] Unlike typical critical reviews, Mitchelmore's writing never reduces books to plot summaries. Instead, his concern is precisely with the irreducible *feeling* of reading, as ungraspable as a forgotten accident, a butterfly floating just out of reach. Deploying neither journalistic evaluation nor scholarly argumentation, his essays hark back to an earlier period in critical history, or even pre-history: the pre-professional era when literary response was woven into the texture of life. The moment, that is, of F.R. Leavis, with whom Mitchelmore shares a certain zealous cantankerousness, and T.S. Eliot's dictum, 'criticism is as inevitable as breathing'.[32] Career-wise, Eliot was an ex-academic, Leavis an ambivalent one – embattled, embittered, with a brittle pride in his outsider status. Mitchelmore's stance is not dissimilar. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he has not left blogging for more lucrative opportunities. Having published 'a dozen or so' newspaper reviews, he remains happier firing off blog posts 'into a gaping void'. Exploring 'the reading experience' is, he insists, his only interest; 'where it ends is of no importance'.[33] In this regard, Britain's first book blogger could perhaps end up being its last – a critic with a dwindling readership, refusing to move with the times.

Amateurs and Professionals

In 2019, *Vulture* magazine declared that 'the indie book blog is dead'. The American website *The Millions*, for instance, which had launched in 2003 as a

[31] S. Mitchelmore, 'Fear of reading', *This Space* (29 July 2009), www.this-space.blogspot.com/2009 (accessed 3 August 2023).
[32] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 13–14.
[33] S. Mitchelmore, 'The beginning of something', *This Space* (22 October 2010), www.this-space.blogspot.com/2010 (accessed 3 August 2023).

one-man 'labour of love with a blogspot.com URL', had matured into a major book review venue, before being bought up by industry news outlet *Publishers Weekly*.[34] This trajectory was symptomatic of a wider pattern. By the 2010s, blogs were no longer the only game in town. Increasingly, they had to compete with polished, professionalised online magazines. From the *Los Angeles Review of Books* to *Literary Hub*, these new players boasted big-name mastheads, slick designs, powerful social media clout, and even, in the case of *Lit Hub*, publishing industry backing. Within this changed online ecology, what would become of that endangered species, the literary blogger? Mitchelmore answered with a 2019 post titled 'On the Death of Book Blogging (Nothing Unhappy)'.[35] From his perspective, *The Millions* was only ever a 'commercial culture site'; its fate said nothing about that of blogging. He also decried former blogosphere peers who had moved on to professional careers, with newspaper by-lines, agents, and advances – as if blogging were an 'unpaid internship' on the way to mainstream success. Resentment aside, his post also made an important point. Whether one moves from blogs to newspapers, little to big magazines, or small presses to conglomerates, professionalisation, for writers of all stripes, is more than a matter of money.

The margins of the literary field have always afforded more creative freedom; the closer one gets to the centre, the more one must conform to what Mitchelmore calls 'established genres', a trade-off as true for critics as novelists. Blogging, for him, is criticism unconstrained by genre. And he is entitled to lament the decline of the form, as bloggers switch sides to become mere reviewers – and as literary websites increasingly mimic their print precursors. Nowadays, both the *TLS* and the *LRB* have their own blogs – though neither are what Mitchelmore would mean by the term. Meanwhile time marches on, with online life transformed, first by Twitter, and, more recently, by streaming. Written reviews now risk being eclipsed by audio-visual literary response: podcasts, BookTube, Bookstagram, BookTok. Despite all of this, a few book blogs survive, swimming against the tide – almost invisible, but in this sense independent again.

Looking back on book blogging in 2014, Mark Thwaite agreed that the party was over. 'An army of amateur literary essayists has never arisen', he

[34] K. Rosenfield, '*The Millions* will live on, but the indie book blog is dead', *Vulture* (9 January 2019), www.vulture.com/2019/01/the-millions-was-the-last-great-indie-book-blog.html (accessed 3 August 2023).

[35] S. Mitchelmore, 'On the death of book blogging (nothing unhappy)', *This Space* (6 February 2019), www.this-space.blogspot.com/2019 (accessed 3 August 2023).

noted, 'and that rather saddens me.'[36] But he added a caveat: if Twitter had killed the literary blog, other fields were alive and kicking. 'Blogs at their best', in his view, were still thriving in 'the vibrant online philosophy community'.[37] A better label than philosophy might be the umbrella term 'theory', encompassing continental philosophy (rather than the analytic tradition dominant in academic philosophy departments), cultural studies, gender studies, and related areas of inquiry. By the twenty-first century, theory in this sense was losing its foothold in UK universities. The heady days of 'high theory' – from the late 1960s through the 1990s – had given way to a more sober moment, marked by departmental closures: Birmingham University's Department of Cultural Studies (widely regarded as the birthplace of that field) was dismantled in 2002, followed by Middlesex University's Philosophy Department (a stronghold of continental thought) in 2010.[38] Contraction and casualisation in the academic job market had also created a growing cadre of precariously employed (or outright unemployed) young intellectuals. Conditions were ripe for theory's migration online.

The Theory Blogosphere

The theory blogosphere, an online arena in which professional philosophers exchanged ideas with ex-colleagues, part-timers, and autodidacts, was apparently open to all. Unlike conventional academic journals, theory blogs were also unencumbered by paywalls, peer review, and protracted publishing schedules. In this environment, far-reaching intellectual movements could take shape in real time – including, for instance, American philosopher Graham Harman's hugely influential 'object-oriented ontology'. The UK scene also included important blogs by philosophers, notably Nina Power's *Infinite Thought* and Lars Iyer's *Spurious*, alongside a distinctive strain of cultural studies, exemplified by Owen Hatherley's *The Measures Taken*, and perhaps the definitive theory blog, Mark Fisher's *k-punk*.

Fisher completed a PhD at the University of Warwick, where he was affiliated with the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, a crucible for new

[36] M. Thwaite, 'What became of literary blogging?', *Guardian* (9 June 2014), www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/jun/09/literary-blogging-twitter (accessed 3 August 2023).
[37] Ibid.
[38] See P. Curtis, 'Cultural elite express opposition to Birmingham closure', *Guardian* (18 July 2002), www.theguardian.com/education/2002/jul/18/highereducation.socialsciences and J. Wolff, 'Why is Middlesex University philosophy department closing?', *Guardian* (17 May 2010), www.theguardian.com/education/2010/may/17/philosophy-closure-middlesex-university (both accessed 3 August 2023).

theoretical trends. Earlier still, music had been crucial to his formation. Fisher first encountered Jacques Derrida 'in the pages of the *New Musical Express* in the 1980s' and regarded its intellectually eclectic journalism as 'a kind of supplementary-informal education system, in which theory acquired a strange, lustrous glamour'.[39] The same could be said of the blogosphere, which contained echoes of earlier print culture; in the words of Simon Reynolds (another key figure in this context), theory bloggers were both a 'lumpen academiat' and a 'music press in exile'.[40] A further ingredient was that perennial British concern: social class. Bloggers like Fisher were keenly aware that their class backgrounds placed them outside the ivory tower; Oxford and Cambridge had never quite figured in their social destinies. British cultural studies had been pioneered by similar outsiders, proletarian 'scholarship boys' who rode a wave of mid-twentieth-century social mobility into prominent academic careers. But as Alex Niven astutely observes, these 'academics of the social democratic period' enjoyed a level of 'professional security' that was badly eroded in subsequent decades.[41] Not only were universities being defunded and marketised, but the public sphere, too, felt increasingly destitute. Fisher shared with his 1950s precursor Richard Hoggart an elegiac sense of cultural decline; but where Hoggart lamented the loss of pre-war working-class culture, Fisher mourned 'postpunk, brutalist architecture, Penguin paperbacks and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop': the post-war convergence of highbrow aesthetics and public service that he called, evocatively, 'popular modernism'.[42] Ultimately, what made Fisher different from most academics was that he did cultural studies from *inside* the culture – a culture that felt, as he often felt himself, on the brink of collapse.

A celebrated example of Fisher's writing is 'Good for Nothing' (2014), his searing essay on depression and class, published in the activist paper *The Occupied Times*.[43] Even when Fisher wrote for magazines, recalls Ivor Southwood, readers could 'recognise the traces of *k-punk* in it, the unexpected analogies and theoretical leaps that were clearly the product of blog-

[39] M. Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life* (Winchester, UK: Zero, 2014), p. 17.
[40] A. Crawford et al., '24 hour theory people: Mark Fisher and the blogosphere' [Part 1], *Sydney Review of Books* (21 February 2020), https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/mark-fisher-blogosphere/ (accessed 2 August 2023).
[41] T. Cutterham, 'Politics beyond Dalston: an interview with Alex Niven', *Review 31* (2013), www.review31.co.uk/interview/view/3/politics-beyond-dalston-an-interview-with-alex-niven (accessed 2 August 2023).
[42] Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 22.
[43] M. Fisher, 'Good for nothing', *The Occupied Times* (19 March 2014), www.theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=12841 (accessed 2 August 2023).

thinking'.[44] Blog-thinking is the perfect term for this essay's associative links, its shifts of scale, its pivots and swerves from the personal to the political and back again. Fisher starts with a frank account of his own mental health history, including self-harm and hospitalisation. His twenties were spent 'drifting' between postgraduate study, temping, and the dole. When he finally landed a teaching job at a further education college, he felt 'vertigo, panic and horror': dislocated from his class of origin, he lacked 'the confidence of one born to the role'.[45] His essay weaves these experiences into a theory of depression – an illness 'best understood', Fisher contends, 'through frames that are impersonal and political rather than individual and "psychological"'. Despite their insights, psychiatry and psychotherapy tend to elide 'the most likely cause' of feelings of worthlessness, namely, imbalances in 'social power'. Drawing on therapist David Smail, Fisher traced the roots of depression to the two most pernicious myths of capitalist ideology: 'magical voluntarism' ('the belief that it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be') and its flipside, 'responsibilisation' (the belief, drilled into the masses, that 'their poverty, lack of opportunities, or unemployment is their fault and their fault alone'). Fiercely eloquent and intelligent, the essay is classic Fisher. It is also retrospectively tragic: three years later, he took his own life, at the height of his writing career.

What Fisher's essayism shares with that of, say, Mitchelmore is its combination of intellectual authority – the currency of more traditional critical essays – with something much more highly prized on the Internet: the authority of experience. Put simply, blog-thinking is always also blog-feeling. And in this, blogging foreshadowed recent trends in the academy. The latest vogue in literary studies is 'postcritique', a new approach to critical interpretation. Postcritical critics argue against 'symptomatic' reading, a now routine way of interpreting texts that presupposes 'hidden depths', unconscious conflict, and latent political content.[46] The core methodology of post-1970s literary theory, symptomatic reading uncovered meaning repressed by the text, thus treated as (or, more crudely, reduced to) a repository of ideology. Postcritique, by contrast, embraces the surface, and recovers a repertoire of affective engagement – attachment, attunement, plain old enjoyment – excluded by previous theorists.

[44] Crawford et al., '24 hour theory people' [Part 2] (27 February 2020), https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/mark-fisher-blogosphere-part-2/ (accessed 2 August 2023).
[45] Fisher, 'Good for nothing' (and below).
[46] See R. Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 54.

So the story goes. Ironically though, postcritique is itself best read symptomatically, as a reaction to the same conditions that created the literary and theoretical blogosphere. The ongoing crisis (both intellectual and economic) in the academic humanities, coupled with the growth of the Internet, are wresting critical response away from professional readers. The postcritical turn represents a belated reclamation of lay reading, a bid for relevance on behalf of a shrinking professoriate eclipsed by online amateurs. Blogging, however, models a different critical practice. Fisher, especially, was nothing if not a symptomatic reader: as he pithily put it, 'if something is not a symptom it's probably not interesting'.[47] But his distinction from earlier theorists was that he never 'stood back' from his texts.[48] Far from a posture of critical distance, his stance was fervently up-close-and-personal. Blending theoretical symptom-detection with the emotional investment of fandom, his was a brand of passionate critique – conducted, of course, knowing that he too was a symptom, a critic with skin in the game.

Conclusion

It would be easy to idealise the blogosphere, as if it were some intellectual utopia untainted by conflict and inequality. The early years of the Internet were indeed driven by this ideal – the so-called 'Californian ideology' of 1990s techno-libertarianism – but time has told a different story.[49] Removing institutional structures does not in itself produce democracy, and networks, as we are now well aware, can bring out the worst in human group dynamics. The blogosphere's most obvious failing was its lack of diversity; with a few exceptions, white male voices still shouted the loudest. The 'boy's club vibe', as Rhian Jones notes, permeates many online subcultures – and male communities of fandom and geekdom are breeding grounds for 'reactionary instincts'.[50] Also, reflects Anwen Crawford, there is always 'less social punishment' for 'men being judgmental and exclusionary than there is for women'.[51]

Nor should one praise online amateurism without acknowledging economics: unlike book reviewing or scholarship, blogging was, and remains,

[47] D. Stubbs, 'Remembering Mark Fisher', *The Quietus* (16 January 2017), www.thequietus.com/articles/21572-mark-fisher-rip-obituary-interview (accessed 2 August 2023).
[48] On 'standing back' as a feature of critique, see Felski, *Limits of Critique*, p. 52.
[49] See R. Barbrook and A. Cameron, 'The Californian ideology', *Science of Culture*, 6:1 (1996), 44–72.
[50] Crawford et al., '24 hour theory people' [Part 1]. [51] Ibid.

unpaid labour. To disparage bloggers-turned-journalists for 'selling out' is thus to romanticise precarity, as if our society's devaluation of writers and intellectuals were something to be celebrated. And anyway, not all bloggers wanted to be avant-garde outsiders. Mainstream ambitions were there from the start, and professionalisation, with all its attendant profits and losses, was always a prospect. One bridge between blogging and the big time was influential indie press Zero Books, co-founded by Fisher, and publisher to more than a few of the bloggers mentioned in this chapter. 'Intellectual without being academic, popular without being populist', Zero Books launched in 2009 with Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, Nina Power's *One-Dimensional Woman*, and Owen Hatherley's *Militant Modernism*.[52] Hatherley, whose debut sparked a career that led all the way to book contracts with Penguin, remembers the remit: 'An attempt to condense all or part of the writer's blog and take it to the people that didn't live on the blogosphere', including 'commissioning editors, book reviewers, academia'; 'I don't regret that', he reflects; 'it's the reason I can pay the rent.'[53] Blogging, for many of its best practitioners, opened out onto wider worlds that would otherwise have remained out of reach. Like Ludwig Wittgenstein's ladder – a tool cast aside once it is climbed – blogging succeeded, and therefore belongs to the past.

Once futuristic, now anachronistic: from today's standpoint, blogs are an oddly untimely technology. And to revisit their brief golden age is to engage in media archaeology – the historical study of dead media and the fantasies they embody.[54] It is also, more simply, to go on a ghost hunt. The early blogosphere remains online not as a carefully preserved archive but as a graveyard of broken links, malfunctioning code, outdated designs, and – a genre unto itself – 'last' blog posts, in which bloggers literally give up the ghost (the common theme: 'social media killed it').[55] The history of blogging is thus an exercise in what Fisher famously called 'hauntology'.[56] Fisher was borrowing from Derrida, but revising his abstract jargon into an idea that travelled more widely. Hauntology might be defined as the cultural history of foreclosed possibilities. For Fisher, the flotsam and jetsam left in the wake

[52] M. Fisher, *K-Punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings*, ed. D. Ambrose (London: Repeater Books, 2018), p. 103.
[53] Crawford et al., '24 hour theory people' [Part 2].
[54] See J. Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).
[55] See, e.g., A. Kotsko, 'What was blogging?', *An und für sich* (29 December 2020), www.itself.blog/2020/12/29/what-was-blogging/ (accessed 2 August 2023).
[56] Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life*, p. 16.

of so-called progress hint at 'lost futures', reflecting the gleam of what might have been. The crackle of vinyl, TV static: our culture is haunted by such futures, memorialised in cast-off technologies. Although the future the early bloggers envisaged never entirely arrived, lessons can still be learned from its loss – and from its ghostly ongoing presence. Learning those lessons would mean eschewing simple nostalgia, which Fisher was always warning against. After all, longing for what has been lost might sound hopelessly melancholy. In hauntology, though, 'what is being longed for' is 'not a particular period, but the resumption of *processes* of democratisation and pluralism' which that period – however imperfectly and incompletely – put in motion.[57] 'What should haunt us', wrote Fisher, 'is not the *no longer*' of a vanished past, 'but the *not yet*' of the futures that past 'trained us to expect'.[58] There is a sense in which blogging has simply been absorbed into the mainstream: diffused but diluted, what was once underground is now everywhere. But blogging also lives on in another, hauntological sense: as the *not yet* of today's Internet. In both of these ways, blogs were, and remain, a vital force in contemporary writing, a distinctive tincture in the culture of the British essay.

[57] Ibid., p. 27. [58] Ibid., p. 14.

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The Essay, Ecocriticism, and the Anthropocene

RICHARD KERRIDGE

The term 'Anthropocene' has become familiar as the name of a proposed – though not officially recognised – new geological period, already in progress, defined by the emergence of human activity as a planetary geomorphic force. In this chapter, I will explore how the paradoxes of the concept emerge in some recent environmental essays. These essays are distinctively Anthropocene, or, at least, they exhibit the marks of our current phase, in which recognition of the severe planetary emergency combines with uncertainty about what is coming. For climate change and other environmental threats do not admit of once-and-for-all, secure solutions. Plots in which the villain is vanquished, and the danger escaped, in a moment of dramatic climax are ill-adapted to environmental concern. Closure – as in security and relaxation after a difficult journey – is not conceivable as a plot destination. Protecting the Amazon rainforest, for example, is an unending effort, demanding renewed campaigns and continuing vigilance. The forest, or parts of it, can only ever be saved *for now*, and what saves it or further imperils it will often be a political turn that happens mainly for reasons other than environmental concern.

The idea of a world in which the threat is no longer there, and the enemies have gone, seems remote and almost fantastic. Even as changes of policy seem to be signs of progress, they are revealed as vulnerable to reversal, and, all the while, scientists continue to warn us of time running out. In October 2022 the United Nations *Emissions Gap Report*, subtitled *The Closing Window*, declared that 'incremental change is no longer an option', and that there is currently 'no credible pathway' to a global temperature increase of no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade.[1] Such ultimatums present themselves as

[1] UN Environment Programme, *Emissions Gap Report 2022: Climate Crisis Calls for Rapid Transformation of Societies* (27 October 2022), www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022 (accessed 3 August 2023).

potential plot-moments, but then the transformation fails to occur, or at least to gather sufficient momentum. Impasse and interim remain – impasse because the drastic, large-scale, transformative policy changes needed are not emerging, or far too slowly and vulnerably, and interim because, in much of the world, climate disaster has not yet arrived. Normality persists, and reasserts itself continually, co-existing with these terrifying forecasts. We do not, most of us, behave as if we knew what we know. As this chapter will show, the brevity of the essay form brings the emotional paradoxes of the Anthropocene clearly into the open. A particular feature is the strong impulse that is felt, nonetheless, to be highly provisional.

Ecocriticism and the Essay

As far back as 2007, the novelist John Lanchester declared about global warming: 'I suspect we're reluctant to think about it because we're worried that if we start we will have no choice but to think about nothing else.'[2] His fear was that there were only two genuine possibilities, polarised and equally disastrous. Not thinking about global warming means doing nothing to avert or mitigate the catastrophe. We wait for it to happen. But thinking about nothing else would be unendurable and might send us running back to the other extreme, the not thinking. Lanchester found it hard to see any position between these two poles. His challenge is that really thinking about global warming – as opposed to playing at thinking about it – will make societies and individuals take transformative action, and until that action begins, they cannot really claim to be thinking. Writers about climate change, species extinction, and ecosystem collapse have to take account of this interim space in which their thoughts take shape, a space pressurised at once by uncertainty and the urgent sense of time passing.

A standard procedure for essayists is to move rapidly from particularity – occasions, anecdotes – to large-scale reflections and back to the particular. Reflection in the essay often arises from an effort to interpret a dramatic moment, often some kind of encounter. That moment is then identified as an example that leads to a general argument; less frequently, the argument appears first and looks to the anecdote for confirmation. Because of the essay form's brevity – which often means that one or two immediate experiences have to suffice – larger reflections often retain a tentative, contingent quality,

[2] J. Lanchester, 'Warmer, warmer', *London Review of Books*, 29:6 (22 March 2007), 3.

which, in the context of the Anthropocene, is a severely pressurised mode but one peculiarly difficult to resolve. Essayistic arguments can still be emphatic, but the emphasis becomes a dramatised occurrence, generated by a certain occasion, a particular moment. Some of the most influential environmental essays prior to our Anthropocene moment already display this pattern.

George Orwell's essay 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad' (1946), for example, begins with the speaker's affectionate and slightly whimsical observations of that creature; he describes the toad fresh from brumation as having 'a very spiritual look, like a strict Anglo-Catholic'.[3] This semi-jocular tone is not entirely left behind when Orwell moves on to celebrate how 'the pleasures of spring are available to everybody and cost nothing' (this was the immediate post-war period in which the National Health Service was created, and Orwell's view chimes with the principles declared in support of that policy)[4], and then to question whether socialists are right to see the love of wild nature as frivolous and regressive.[5] Similarly, John Berger's 1977 essay 'Why Look at Animals?', which became a foundational text for the interdisciplinary field of animal studies, starts with a large-scale historical narrative about shifting human relationships with non-human animals, but later zooms in to some apparently overheard complaints by children at a zoo: 'Where is he? Why doesn't he move? Is he dead?'[6] This descent into a specific scene prompts the dramatic statement – with the air of a sudden thought – on which the whole essay turns: 'And this unprofessional, unexpressed question is the one worth answering.'[7] More recently, Paul Kingsnorth's controversial essay 'Dark Ecology' (2012), which challenges 'Ecomodernism' and what Kingsnorth sees as the deluded hopes of mainstream environmentalists, starts with two jolting particulars: his own recently learned skill of mowing by scythe, and a report on the writings of the murderous terrorist Theodore Kaczynski, the 'Unabomber'. Disturbingly, Kingsnorth is more impressed than he would wish by Kaczynski's arguments about the degradation of human freedom through systems of modern technology.

This movement between particularity and general reflection – zooming in and out – is essential to most argumentative writing, but in the essay it

[3] G. Orwell, 'Some thoughts on the common toad' in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1950), p. 202.
[4] See R. Kerridge, 'Nature writing for the welfare state', *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, 26:1 (2015), 35–43.
[5] Orwell, 'Some thoughts on the common toad', p. 204.
[6] J. Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (London: Penguin, 2009), p. 33. [7] Ibid.

comes to the fore, as the number of anecdotes can only be small and the whole work characteristically has the dramatic style of being a single moment's utterance, usually a relatively contingent one. The ecocritical scholar Simone Schröder calls this air of spontaneity 'reflective subjectivity',[8] and associates it with a tradition of seeing art as 'purpose-free' – that is, prompted by the moment with only minimal prior intention.[9] One of the definitive ways an essay can be seen to fail is when the anecdote remains merely that, an anecdote, and does not grow into an exemplar. In the Anthropocene, in the context of the impasse Lanchester describes between real thinking and no thinking, this holding-back, this failure to move between scales, is itself a form of refusing to think. Climate change makes this movement difficult, with neither extreme offering appeal.

The essay theorist Brian Dillon, defining the mood he calls 'essayism', says that the essay 'aspires to express the quintessence or crux of its matter, thus to a sort of polish and integrity, and it wants at the same time to insist that its purview is partial, that being incomplete is a value in itself for it better reflects the brave and curious but faltering nature of the writing mind'.[10] He says that one way of holding together these conflicting impulses is the collection of essays in which the speaker-protagonist (Michel de Montaigne is Dillon's originating example) repeatedly starts again, with the thematic questions once again open, setting out to see what will happen:[11] 'The essayistic or essaying subject turns out to be sleepy and dispersed, liable to fall into a swoon, forget itself, and wake again hardly knowing what or who it is.'[12] Simultaneously, there is weakness, in the propensity of conclusions and resolutions to dissolve, and resilience, in the ability to look afresh and not dissolve with them. The Anthropocene intensifies this effect of the essay as a hesitant yet, nevertheless, asserted attempt.

The Anthropocene

The concept of the 'Anthropocene' was proposed in 2000 by atmospheric chemists Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, who argued that in the course of the Holocene, the 'post-glacial geological epoch of the past ten to

[8] S. Schröder, *The Nature Essay: Ecocritical Explorations* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), p. 15.
[9] Ibid., p. 18.
[10] B. Dillon, *Essayism* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), p. 18.
[11] For more on this stuttering start, both within the essay and the essay tradition writ large, see K. Murphy's 'Surprised into form: the beginnings of the English essay' in this volume (Ch. 2).
[12] Dillon, *Essayism*, p. 19.

twelve thousand years' that we still inhabit, 'mankind's activities' have gradually become 'a significant geological morphological force'.[13] That force becomes yet more pervasive due to the global nature of the climate system and the factors affecting it: global industrial capitalism, the continuing increase in the human population, and the accumulation of waste matter, such as carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and non-biodegradable materials such as plastic in oceans and landfill sites. Crutzen and Stoermer suggested that the new epoch dates from 'the latter part of the 18th century', or 'the period when data retrieved from glacial ice cores show the beginning of a growth in the atmospheric concentrations of several "greenhouse gases", in particular CO_2 and CH_4'.[14] Global warming was the leading, paradigm-shifting example of the global consequences of human action, but the term 'Anthropocene' quickly came to be used for a whole range of other effects from human activities.

The concept of the Anthropocene is double-edged, however. As ecocritics Hannes Bergthaller and Eva Horn put it, human agency in the Anthropocene is characterised by 'the paradoxical combination of immense power and lack of control, of goal-oriented action and unintended side-effects'.[15] The concept invites human beings to recognise and accept a much greater degree of responsibility – in past and in future – for the ecological state of the biosphere, while confronting them with their spectacular failure to take responsibility for – to understand and contextualise – their own actions. For the most part, the geomorphic changes that humans have brought about are unintended. Looked at one way, the Anthropocene calls on us to accept that there is now no alternative to a much more concerted effort to engineer the climate and other ecological processes in a positive manner. This is the point of view known as ecomodernism, the one rejected by Kingsnorth in 'Dark Ecology'.[16] Humanity, from this perspective, has to embrace its lonely role at the top. There is no route of retreat to the old position of smallness in the face of vast natural forces. But, from another viewpoint, human capability is diminished by the sheer magnitude of the consequences that people did not foresee when they set out to innovate and industrialise. Even as the concept of the Anthropocene challenges collective humanity, then, to take greater and more

[13] P.J. Crutzen and E.F. Stoermer, 'The "Anthropocene"', *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Newsletter*, 41 (May 2000), 17.
[14] Ibid.
[15] E. Horn and H. Bergthaller, *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 67.
[16] Ibid., pp. 70–1.

exceptional responsibility, it also admonishes us for our past hubris, and relegates us to the category of stumbling, floundering creatures whose plans go awry – natural creatures, caught up in forces beyond our understanding.

This latter perception returns us to nature, reminding us that the Anthropocene concept does not identify human activity as the *only* geomorphic force. Bergthaller and Horn observe that humanity cannot be separated, as an ecological agent, from the assemblage of which it is part. Humans, they claim, are 'defined by their position in a network of non-human life-forms – from the bacteria and fungi colonising their bodies to domesticated animals and plants', and therefore human agency is not clearly separated from that of these other creatures and forces throughout the system.[17] This perspective is known as 'ecological posthumanism', or what the ecocritical theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the 'zoecentric' view, and it has strong affinities with new materialist accounts of the multiplicities of non-human agency at work in any setting.[18] Theorists of this persuasion seek 'to lead humans out of their anthropocentric arrogance into a world of mutual dependency and distributed agency'.[19]

Both ecomodernism and ecological posthumanism consequently share the 'struggle to grasp the paradoxical structure of human agency in the Anthropocene'.[20] On one side, the imperative for deliberate, large-scale purpose calls for a daring break with ingrained beliefs and desires, personal and cultural: a kind of self-transcendence. On the other is the equally daunting and necessary task of seeing this human purpose in the context of endlessly complex and shifting ecological relationships that make watchfulness for unforeseen side effects essential. It also calls for flexibility when they appear. This dual-pronged, antithetical imperative resists being mapped onto the old distinction between confidence and humility.

Bergthaller, writing separately, observes another aspect of the paradox. Two properties, once definitively opposed, now come together:

> It [the paradox of the Anthropocene] joins intentionality and meaning, those quintessential properties of the human as it is traditionally understood, with the domain of geology, that is of blind natural forces – without subsuming one under the other. The idea of the Anthropocene contains both possibilities: that human meaning-making is revealed as another aspect of geological process, *or* that geological process is incorporated into human meaning-making.[21]

[17] Ibid., p. 72. [18] Ibid., pp. 72–5. [19] Ibid., p. 73. [20] Ibid., p. 74.
[21] H. Bergthaller, 'Humans' in J. Parham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 212.

For Bergthaller, it is the consciousness of this paradox in which human and natural forces are caught in a chicken-and-egg or catch-22 condition of interdependence, and the puzzle of how to act in response to that awareness, that is the decisive break involved in the concept of the new epoch: 'it is not that we have acquired the ability to transform the Earth system but rather that our species has come to *recognise* what it is doing'.[22] That new self-awareness is an emergence from nature, challenging our former proactive hubris. The Anthropocene takes humanity out of nature as a weakened entity, even as it moves to return us to that category by seeing us – *seeing* us – as a geomorphic force.

A related paradox comes from what the ecocritic Timothy Clark has identified as an aspect of the ecological crisis that he calls 'scale-derangements', which pose a great challenge to representation and action. He observes, as Timothy Morton does also in his concept of 'hyperobjects', that the scale of the catastrophic ecological processes in space and time is much larger than that of the dramatic events that make up a human story; and yet, the human scale now has to account for the massive accumulation of phenomena that, taken individually, are too small to register in such a grand story. The effect of scale derangement is to disrupt a number of previously established binaries fundamental to concepts of meaningful action, including major versus minor, or 'important' versus 'trivial': 'Environmental slogans urge us "eat less meat and help save the planet", or they follow horrifying predictions of climate chaos with injunctions, no less solemn, not to leave electrical appliances on standby or overfill the kettle. Such language ... enacts a bizarre derangement of scales, collapsing the trivial and the catastrophic into each other.'[23] Can we imagine a narrative in which conventional plot-points, such as falling in love or escaping from danger, are displaced by events like overwatering the garden, formerly barely worth a mention but suddenly – cumulatively – so important that the fate of the biosphere seems to depend on them?

Moral significance changes with shifts of scale-perspective. As Clark writes:

> What is self-evident or rational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another. Hence, progressive arguments designed to affirm individual rights and help disseminate Western levels of prosperity may even

[22] Ibid., p. 211.
[23] T. Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 136.

> resemble, on another scale, an insane plan to destroy the biosphere. Yet, for, say, any individual household or motorist a scale-effect in their actions is invisible.[24]

Such dilemmas cannot be resolved by the assumption that one scale-perspective simply and finally trumps the other.

The most obvious challenge to the concept of the Anthropocene is that it presents 'Anthropos' in Enlightenment-humanist fashion as a single entity, an individual with agency that, collectively, adds up to an all-inclusive personified 'humanity'. This construct hides political questions involving difference and dispersing from that universal collective smaller-group responsibility for environmental disasters. As ecocritic Joni Adamson points out: 'When employed unconsciously to mean "aggregate *Anthropos*," or "all humans," the word *anthropos* fails to account for unequal human agency or unequal human vulnerabilities.'[25] 'Capitalocene' and 'Plantationocene' are among the alternatives that have been offered to the term Anthropocene, which, however, seems to have sticking-power. The one emphatic point that the concept makes, about the need for different societies to accept a shared responsibility for the biosphere, necessarily entails questions about the distribution of wealth and power, but does not allow escape routes out of the Anthropocene by transferring the blame.

For the ecocritical essayist, one consequence is the rise to prominence of the old questions about whether and when to use the pronoun 'we'. To whom, exactly, does the speaking 'we' refer? Can it modulate, growing to encompass collective humanity and then contracting to designate more specific groups? Crutzen and Stoermer proposed the concept partly as a scientific insight, but also in the hope that a general recognition of unintended consequences, and of the scale of responsibility involved, would prompt an era of deliberate collectively claimed responsibility and combined decision-making. Considered in relation to inequalities of wealth, the Anthropocene idea can serve as a provocation, challenging people to accept what has become necessarily a universal responsibility, while simultaneously recognising the relationship between environmental responsibility and the distribution of wealth and power.

[24] T. Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 73.

[25] J. Adamson, 'We have never been "Anthropos": from environmental justice to cosmopolitics' in S. Oppermann and S. Iovino (eds.), *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 160.

Findings: Kathleen Jamie

I wish now to examine some examples of meetings between the provisional mood and form of the essay and the specific demands of the Anthropocene. I begin with Kathleen Jamie, whose essay 'Findings' (in her 2005 essay collection of that title) describes a visit to Ceann Iar, a deserted island just off the Outer Hebrides, which provides an opportunity to consider the detritus she and her companions find there. Some of that debris is natural and non-human, from creatures recently sentient: a half-beached, half-submerged whale's corpse, 'a lamb, very new, with its stomach opened by buzzards', some rabbit bones, and the skull of a gannet (a splendidly diving white seabird). Other items are the result of human activity: plastic bottles, a traffic cone, plastic rope, shoes, aerosol cans, a piece of an aircraft, milk cartons, faded toilet-cleaner bottles, netting, a bath-time duck, and the head of a doll that, if tilted, 'blinked her eyes in surprise'.[26] Jamie reflects on this jumble of waste objects:

> Before me, in a dip in the land, was a very small loch where flag irises would soon be in bloom. A white plastic tub was trapped among their stems.
>
> The islands are a 21st-century midden of aerosols and plastic bottles, and I was thinking about what we'd valued enough to keep. It seemed that what we chose to take – the orb of quartz, the whalebones – were not the things that endured, but those that had been transformed by death or weather . . . and I wondered if it's still possible to value that which endures, if durability is still a virtue, when we have invented plastic, and the doll's head with her tufts of hair and rolling eyes may well persist after our own have cleaned back down to bone.[27]

One informing feature of this essay is the tradition of the found object that prompts a meditation on the pathos of mutability. Nature writing is adept at containing such moments (which might otherwise expand disruptively) in the form of a prearranged expedition or quest in which the moment is a pause, like a brief stop to take breath. It is understood that such pauses cannot last long. In this case, the memento mori afforded by bones and decaying bodies has its meaning complicated by the presence of plastic objects whose alternate, even alien pathos arises from their inability to decay, their evocation of both life and death. The doll's blink of surprise, perhaps equally suggestive of innocence and of horror film, seems to bring her to life,

[26] K. Jamie, *Findings* (London: Sort of Books, 2005), pp. 55, 60.

[27] Ibid., pp. 60, 66–7.

and yet to belong to some non-linear temporality encompassing both the present moment and some earlier time.

Plastic objects like these that have reached even a place as remote as Ceann Iar disrupt the formerly easy distinction between wild and domestic. Ceann Iar's remoteness is its established meaning. The island is a lost world, a remnant. Previously inhabited by crofters, it was abandoned in the mid-twentieth century as a place incompatible with even the most marginal forms of modern living. The environmental essayist Cal Flyn, in her recent collection *Islands of Abandonment* (2021), has an essay about a visit to Skomer, a similar island, now left to feral cattle. Ceann Iar is too small and bare even to be an object of desire for tourists seeking a wild setting for a brief respite from modernity. It is outside the capitalist desire system. Jamie's expedition with a group of birdwatchers can therefore be seen both as a step outside the system and an attempt to bring Ceann Iar back in, giving it meaning as a place that offers a more austere and inaccessible wildness than the established destinations.

But when the essayist encounters an accumulation of tide-borne litter, she finds that the island can no longer simply represent the condition of being a wild place outside the world's modern traffic. In the Anthropocene, there is no space that anthropogenic pollution does not penetrate, and no space where one can be confident that one will not find traces of consumerist mentality (another example is the photograph, much circulated in 2017, of a tin of Spam 16,230 feet down in the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the Pacific). For Jamie on Ceann Iar, the uncanny object, a doll's severed head, brings the domestic into the midst of the remote wild, representing at once the familiarity of home and the violence that large-scale ecological forces have the potential to inflict. We thus find here one of Clark's scale derangements. The doll carries with it the aura of a protected personal space, a child's bedroom. Thrown away or lost, the doll has been expelled into the large-scale, external world, where it is carried on the tides perhaps for hundreds of miles before snagging randomly. Without gradation or mediation, the small abruptly and violently opens into the large. In consequence, a paradox forms as small becomes large. Outside its former domestic surroundings, the doll swells in size into an epic traveller who represents the enormous reach of commodified domesticity, a system able to mass-produce identical objects that individually signify small-scale domestic affection. In this, such objects become global.

Inversions, contractions, and expansions like these ask us to reassess the relationship between domestic spaces and global forces, to hold both in

vision. This is how Jamie makes anecdote into exemplar. Eyes and beheadings recur as motifs. Seals flop into the water as the essayist approaches, and then their eyes watch her. The whale's eye is missing; instead, 'there was one dark orifice, like a cave, in its mouldering head'.[28] In contrast, the doll's eye opens and cannot decay or be eaten. She recalls other narratives of debris on beaches: 'an otter garrotted by plastic tape' and 'the severed head of a donkey'.[29] As these images add up, the clearest comparison sets the doll's head alongside the gannet's skull as counterparts. The essayist reveals that she has long wanted one of these skulls, to keep as an ornament: 'A gannet's skull would be good to have. Or a whaup's [Scots word for curlew], but bird skulls are rare to find. I dare say most seabirds die at sea, and their weightless bones are pulverised by the water or the wind.'[30] The essay itself began with the recollection of an earlier effort to get one: 'I hacked off the gannet's head with my penknife.'[31] The individual essayist here becomes the decapitating, pulverising force. How the doll lost its head is not known, so the violence can be attributed to the larger-scale forces, thereby becoming symbolic. Her attempt to preserve this gannet's skull fails, however: the caustic soda in which she placed it softened the bones, and the bird 'merely bobbed up to glare at me from the pot'.[32] The staring natural head and the plastic head of the doll uncannily change places several times in the essay.

By the end, the essayist has taken the second gannet's head home. The skull (now broken apart) is a piece of the vast wild brought into domestic space, where it evokes vastness while keeping it safely contained. That is the conventional expectation of such keepsakes, expansion followed by guaranteed contraction. In contrast, the doll and the other debris remain on the wild shore. In an Anthropocenic exchange reminiscent of Bergthaller's paradox and Clark's derangements of scale, these waste objects become souvenirs in each other's spaces. Jamie now wishes that she had brought the doll's head home with the gannet's. She pictures it on her desk, 'like a paperweight, with her mad tufts of hair and those sea-blue blinking eyes'.[33] This might have been a domestication too far, however, the doll as a revenant, back from the pulverising wild, adding a third and more ominous stage to the reversals of the Anthropocene. Perhaps that is why the doll, with her eyes both sweet and accusing, can only be an imagined presence. Jamie concludes the essay unsure whether durability can still be valued – whether it can be contained

[28] Ibid., p. 57. [29] Ibid., p. 61. [30] Ibid., p. 51. [31] Ibid., p. 49. [32] Ibid., p. 50.
[33] Ibid., p. 69.

and controlled. The doll brought home – that third, imagined shift of scale – represents a step beyond the ecocritical imaginary of this essayist.

Birth Striking: Jessica Gaitán Johannesson

In an essay in her collection *The Nerves and their Endings: Essays on Crisis and Response* (2022), Jessica Gaitán Johannesson, a writer of Colombian and Swedish heritage living in Britain, looks back on her leading role in an organisation called Birth Strike, whose purpose was to support people who felt unable, in conscience, to have children because of climate change. Their motives were frequently misunderstood: '"Well, first of all," I started, "I wouldn't say I'm not having children for the sake of the planet, but for the sake of my child."'[34] Thus, abruptly, the Birth Strikers would find themselves saying tentative, intimate things in public. After Johannesson and her collaborators had closed the movement, she asked herself how she felt. Had her position changed?

> Sometimes, it feels more possible to expand our family than it did a year ago. It feels less signed and sealed, less as if it's already gone and done for, as my fertile years leak down the side of my bed, through the windows, and into the river that runs through Bath, as fear moves through us and a massive chunk of the Arctic moves south ... It's not that I feel more optimistic. Rather, I've come to think that in trying to decide whether it was right or wrong to bring a child into this now, I was asking the less helpful questions, the ones less anchored in the now I'm living in.[35]

Again, scales and landscapes violently merge. Like a piece of a glacier carried off by a torrent, a personal 'landscape' of hopes and plans breaks up and is rapidly subsumed into a larger planetary space, the global climate system. Partitions fall away, and the movement of fear as it floods through people can now be seen as part of the same phenomenon as tide movements and melting ice caps. We have seen changes of meaning occur when scale-perspectives shift: what seems desirable on a small-scale, the individual or family, is revealed as a huge danger when expanded to the global. But for Johannesson, it seems, the small-scale is no longer available. No compartment shelters one from the large-scale.

[34] J.G. Johannesson, *The Nerves and Their Endings: Essays on Crisis and Response* (London: Scribe, 2022), p. 146.
[35] Ibid., p. 153.

Yet this merging of scales is not stable, nor once and for all. Because the climate disaster is still, primarily, for most wealthy countries a prospect rather than an event that has hit with full force, those scales drift apart again. The personal landscape detaches from the global; the smaller scale re-emerges, incommensurable, as before, with the larger. We are denied a climactic plot. A profound resolution is made, yet there is no denouement. Uneasy normality continues, accompanied by a panicky sense of the fertile years leaking away like melted ice. Decisions are momentous in their implication, and yet they come back and pose themselves repeatedly. A journalist asks, 'How did you arrive at this decision?'

> Look at us, I felt like saying (although she couldn't see us), do we look like people who have arrived? . . . How do you arrive if you don't know where you're heading – three, four or five degrees above pre-industrial levels, civilization collapse in five, ten years or twenty – if no one can tell you with certainty how quickly you, or someone else, will get there?[36]

In this interim state, the idea of arrival becomes meaningless. When can we say that climate change has happened? How will we know the moment of its arrival, even *if* the idea of such a moment makes sense? Has climate change already happened, but with practical implications still to unfold, and in some respects still to be decided? In response to this scale of planetary crisis, Johannesson structures her essay as one that cannot arrive at a settled conclusion. Her book's title hints at this, with its play on the word 'endings'; its essays are intermittent in form, full of gaps. Recollections of conversations and other incidents are interspersed with reflections that seem to be updates or bulletins, contingent but not decisively superseding what went before. Among these, one finds italicised passages of more formal, summarised argument – about population, global warming, and whether her provisional decision not to have children should be described as a choice – set out as if they are there to help speaker and reader reconsider. Also included, strikingly, are passages addressed, like letters, to an imagined child, who is sometimes the child that the speaker and her partner will forego, or else find after a few more years that they have foregone, and sometimes a child that they may eventually have after all, by birth or adoption – a child who will later read these attempts to explain.

[36] Ibid., p. 137.

Indifference, Strangers, and Strands

Towards the end of 'Things to Come', the final essay in his collection *An Indifference of Birds* (2020), the nature writer and novelist Richard Smyth has this passage:

> All the birds now alive, every goldfinch on a teazelhead, every magpie on a gutter, every flickering summer swift (these are the birds I can see from my office window as I write), will die – of course they will, most within a year or two, some within a decade, all within, I hope, my lifetime, and we'll all die too, after a while, along with everything else. This isn't news to us (perhaps it would be news to the birds, or perhaps not) . . . Our concerns about the birds, in short, aren't shared by the birds.[37]

For a moment, Smyth's speaker seems to pause in the face of a challenging thought, one that raises the spectre of fatalism: if the birds cannot be said to share our concerns (that is, if they do not, in their relatively short lives, have the self-consciousness and the scale-perspective that would bring awareness of the threat of extinction), why do we care what happens to them? That thought leads to another:

> Faced with the idea of losing the birds, in whole or in part, a disinterested observer might turn to us, the humans, and shrug: *your loss*. They'd be right. That's exactly what it would be, in fact what it already is: our loss, as the world we know is stripped of richness, of depth, of chiming multiplicity – as birds vanish, and the meanings of things vanish with them. We might as well be burning books, shredding reels of film, taking sledgehammers to the cities of antiquity. Is this a petty human concern? Perhaps it is – but, really, petty human concerns are the only sort we have.[38]

Indifference is not quite the right word, if it implies a stance: a lack of concern with something recognised to exist. Birds are not indifferent to the world revealed by their organs of perception; they respond constantly to its attractions and threats, including those furnished by people. Rather, Smyth's observation is that birds have no access to the perspectives across time and space that are required to see threats such as extinction and global warming: 'We share a physical world but our sensory and mental worlds remain discrete, entire, complete.'[39] Or so we assume. When we face our awareness of these larger scales, our human exceptionality becomes starker and lonelier. Here too, the essayist arrives at a version of the paradox described by

[37] R. Smyth, *An Indifference of Birds* (Axminster, UK: Uniform, 2020), p. 93. [38] Ibid., p. 94.
[39] Ibid.

Bergthaller: to see ourselves as a geological force, always combined with multiple others, intensifies our sense of exceptionality.

Rebecca Tamás, in an essay 'On Panpsychism' in her collection *Strangers* (2020), probes in a different direction from Smyth. Her concern is not with the mutual impenetrability of the perceptual worlds of different species, but with the origin of the human mind in the same material evolutionary processes that produced non-human forms of intelligence. As we learn more about the variety, intricacy, and subtlety of the exchanges of information – chemical, visual, sonic, tactile – constantly at work in making the world, the less tenable it becomes to see human perception as occupying a detached subject position, with the non-human world as its object: 'A tree doesn't think like a snake, or a stone, or an amoeba, or like us. The word "think" begins to crumble and fracture under the weight of itself, under all of these different beings.'[40] Moreover, our thoughts are the products of our interactions with other modes of perception: 'There is a radical and shocking alterity bound up in every physical and mental possibility we have.'[41] Yet in showing us this intricate co-production of self and other, of human and nature, the essay reveals a crisis that calls on us to take exceptional responsibility. Tamás concludes with an argument not far from Smyth's in suggesting that our perception of our own embeddedness as the condition we stand to lose must be our motive for exceptional action: 'One mind is never going to be enough for me.'[42] This argument returns human consciousness to nature in order to justify detaching it once more.

To take one last example, the poet Jean Sprackland published a collection of essays, *Strands* (2012), about her regular walks on a beach near Liverpool that immediately brings together contrasting and deranged scales. The beach itself is real and symbolic, a sublime threshold – an edge from which the infinite may be confronted – and a familiar leisure space. Each essay in the collection takes an object found during one of these walks as the occasion for essaying. One essay starts with a creature that lies on the sand, washed-up from the depths. Another, echoing Crusoe, considers some quite astonishing footprints exposed by the morning tide. As the waves withdraw, they strip off a layer of mud, revealing human and animal footprints from the early Neolithic era. These marks have waited for thousands of years, but this evening the tide will return and erase them forever. Here is an abrupt switch

[40] R. Tamás, *Strangers: Essays on the Human and Nonhuman* (London: Makina Books, 2020), p. 49.
[41] Ibid., p. 48. [42] Ibid., p. 49.

between extremes of scale, with scarcely enough time for human responses to form. A similar scale-effect occurs in an essay about plastic litter. After compiling a list of plastic items found on a single walk, Sprackland reflects:

> Can we even imagine a world without plastic? What was life like before it so thoroughly colonised our homes, offices, vehicles, streets, shops, gardens and parks? Its success story has been so phenomenal that it's hard to say what we would be without it. But our grandparents would know. We've only been mass-producing plastic since the 1930s: there was a time within living memory when plastic was a rare sight, and a novelty.[43]

Here are several scale derangements. The mass-production of plastic goods began within living memory. Set against geological time, or 'deep time', that is scarcely an eye-blink. In that time, plastic has filled up the world. Spatially, this essay moves from the immediate setting of the beach, contained by an afternoon walk, out to the continent-sized Great Pacific Garbage Patch, where the tides have brought plastic items together in the form of an island. As with the washed-up deep-sea creatures found by other ecocritical essayists, there is a curious inversion in which the deepest and most inaccessible places become thoroughly known and domesticated, while the nearby, familiar places become mysterious and vast. Sprackland researches the objects she finds, and her investigations take her long distances in space and time, yet all is contained in the essayistic narrative of a short leisure-event, an afternoon's walk. This ability to expand and contract is essential to the short-form essay, and Sprackland has found a way of naturalising the form, though in so doing she demonstrates how we confine these problems to certain spaces. The essayist may achieve a momentary overlap of scales, as objects exchange places, but only fleetingly, and always precluding closure. In this respect, the essay is a form suited to the Anthropocene and its paradoxes.

[43] J. Sprackland, *Strands: A Year of Discoveries on the Beach* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012), p. 107.

Appendix 1
Alphabetical List of Essayists

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013)
Joseph Addison (1672–1719)
Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969)
S.R.B. Attoh Ahuma (1863–1921)
John Aikin (1747–1822)
John Akomfrah (1957–)
Tariq Ali (1943–)
Darran Anderson (1980–)
Perry Anderson (1938–)
G.E.M. Anscombe (1919–2001)
Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)
Thomas Arnold (1795–1842)
John Austin (1790–1859)
Francis Bacon (1561–1626)
Joshua Baildon (c. 1592–1660s)
Alexander Bain (1818–1903)
James Baldwin (1924–1987)
Enid Balint (1903–1994)
Michael Balint (1896–1970)
J.G. Ballard (1930–2009)
Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825)
Julian Barnes (1946–)
John Barrow (1764–1848)
Brian Barry (1936–2009)
Roland Barthes (1915–1980)
F.W. Bateson (1901–1978)
Richard Bathurst (1722–1762)
Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)
Mary Beard (1955–)
Samuel Beckett (1906–1989)
Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)
Martin du Bellay (1495–1559)
Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953)
Catherine Belsey (1940–2021)

Walter Benjamin (1892–1940)
Arnold Bennett (1867–1931)
Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)
John Berger (1926–2017)
George Berkeley (1685–1753)
Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997)
Annie Besant (1847–1933)
Wilfred Bion (1897–1979)
Isabella Bird (1831–1904)
John Black (1783–1855)
Richard Blackmore (1654–1729)
William Blackwood (1776–1834)
James Boswell (1740–1795)
Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973)
Robert Boyle (1627–1691)
Katherine Bradley (1846–1914)
Richard Brathwait (1588–1673)
Nicholas Breton (c. 1545/53–c. 1625/6)
Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755–1826)
C.D. Broad (1887–1971)
Henry Brougham (1778–1868)
Thomas Browne (1605–1682)
Eustace Budgell (1686–1737)
Bill Buford (1954–)
Charles Burney (1726–1814)
John Hill Burton (1809–1881)
Robert Burton (1577–1640)
Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)
Edward Carpenter (1844–1929)
Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806)
Edward Cave (1691–1754)
Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673)
William Cavendish (1593–1676)
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894)
Bruce Chatwin (1940–1989)
Amit Chaudhuri (1962–)
Rosinka Chaudhuri (1965–)
G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936)
Mary Chudleigh (1656–1710)
Hélène Cixous (1937–)
Frances Power Cobbe (1822–1904)
William Cobbett (1763–1835)
Teju Cole (1975–)
John Collins (1802–1852)
John Churton Collins (1848–1908)

George Colman (1762–1836)
Auguste Comte (1798–1857)
Joseph Conrad (1857–1924)
Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713)
Edith Cooper (1862–1913)
Edward Copleston (1776–1849)
William Cornwallis (c. 1579–1614)
Abraham Cowley (1618–1667)
Emily Crawford (1841–1915)
John Croker (1780–1857)
Axel Cronstedt (1722–1765)
Sir Thomas Culpeper (1625/6–1697)
William Dalrymple (1965–)
Humphry Davy (1778–1829)
Seamus Deane (1940–2021)
Alain de Botton (1969–)
Philippe de Commines (1447–1511)
Daniel Defoe (1660–1731)
J.W. de Graft Johnson (1933–1999)
John Dennis (1658–1734)
Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859)
Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)
René Descartes (1596–1650)
Shashi Deshpande (1938–)
Charles Dickens (1812–1870)
Emilia Francis Dilke (1840–1904)
Brian Dillon (1969–)
Isaac D'Israeli (1766–1848)
Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) (1832–1898)
Jonathan Dollimore (1948–)
John Donne (1572–1631)
Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961)
Robert Dossie (1717–1777)
Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930)
John Dryden (1631–1700)
John Dunton (1659–1733)
Geoff Dyer (1958–)
Terry Eagleton (1943–)
Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–1893)
Umberto Eco (1932–2016)
Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849)
Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817)
Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965)
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)
Anne Enright (1962–)

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)
T.C. Esquire (1602–1652)
Marian Evans (George Eliot) (1819–1880)
Bernadine Evaristo (1959–)
John Evelyn (1620–1706)
Frederic W. Farrar (1831–1903)
Owen Felltham (1602–1668)
Rita Felski (1956–)
Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)
Henry Fielding (1707–1754)
Mark Fisher (1968–2017)
Richard Flecknoe (c. 1600–1678)
Cal Flyn (1987–)
Leontia Flynn (1974–)
John Forster (1812–1876)
Michel Foucault (1926–1984)
Anna Freud (1895–1982)
Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)
Henry Fuseli (1741–1825)
Elisa Gabbert (1979–)
John Galsworthy (1867–1933)
John Galt (1779–1839)
Aulus Gellius (125 CE–180 CE)
Conrad Gessner (1516–1565)
Grace Gethin (1676–1697)
William Gifford (1756–1826)
Mary Leman Gillies (1796–1869)
William Gilpin (1724–1804)
Paolo Giovio (1483–1552)
William Godwin (1756–1836)
Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774)
Nadine Gordimer (1923–2014)
Stephen Graham (1884–1975)
Günter Grass (1927–2015)
William Rathbone Greg (1809–1881)
Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932)
Mark Greif (1975–)
Charles Valentine Le Grice (1773–1858)
Ralph Griffiths (1720–1803)
Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540)
John Hall (1627–1656)
Joseph Hall (1574–1656)
Sarah Hall (1974–)
Stuart Hall (1932–2014)
Alexander Hamilton (1762–1824)

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)
R.M. Hare (1919–2002)
William Waddy Harris (c. 1860–1929)
Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928)
Philip Hartog (1864–1947)
Owen Hatherley (1981–)
Terence Hawkes (1932–2014)
Richard Haydocke (1569–1642)
J.E. Casely Hayford (1866–1930)
Eliza Haywood (1693–1756)
William Hazlitt (1778–1830)
G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831)
Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803)
Haly Heron (c. 1550–1591)
Sheila Heti (1976–)
Maurice Hewlett (1861–1923)
Christopher Hitchens (1949–2011)
Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)
William Hogarth (1697–1764)
James Hogg (1770–1835)
Richard Hoggart (1918–2014)
Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809)
Francis Horner (1778–1817)
William Howitt (1792–1879)
David Hume (1711–1776)
Leigh Hunt (1784–1859)
Jacques Hurault (1480–1546)
Richard Hurd (1720–1808)
Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)
Thomas Huxley (1825–1895)
Douglas Hyde (1860–1949)
Richard Jackson (1621–1677)
James Charles Stuart, James VI and I (1566–1625)
Anna Jameson (1794–1860)
Kathleen Jamie (1962–)
George Jardine (1742–1827)
Derek Jarman (1942–1994)
Richard Jefferies (1848–1887)
Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850)
Jerome K. Jerome (1859–1927)
Jessica Gaitán Johannesson (1985–)
Ralph Johnson (1629–1695)
Robert Johnson (1586–1626)
Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)
James Joyce (1882–1941)

Tony Judt (1948–2010)
Carl Jung (1875–1961)
Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)
Sudipta Kaviraj (1945–)
William Kenrick (1725–1779)
Frank Kermode (1919–2010)
Marian Keyes (1963–)
Masud Khan (1924–1989)
Taran N. Khan (1978–)
Paul Kingsnorth (1972–)
Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)
Andrew Kippis (1725–1795)
Melanie Klein (1882–1960)
Greg Kneidel (1971–)
Vicesimus Knox (1752–1821)
Chris Kraus (1955–)
Charles Lamb (1775–1834)
John Lanchester (1962–)
Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864)
Bruno Latour (1947–2022)
Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) (1856–1935)
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716)
Charlotte Lennox (1730–1804)
Ben Lerner (1979–)
Roger L'Estrange (1616–1704)
Amy Levy (1861–1889)
G.H. Lewes (1817–1878)
Eliza Lynn Linton (1822–1898)
W.J. Linton (1812–1897)
John Locke (1632–1704)
J.G. Lockhart (1794–1854)
William Lovett (1800–1877)
E.V. Lucas (1868–1938)
György Lukács (1885–1971)
Robert Wilson Lynd (1879–1949)
Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998)
Thomas Macaulay (1800–1859)
Helen Macfarlane (1818–1860)
Peter Mack (1955–)
Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831)
Louis MacNeice (1907–1963)
Macrobius (370–430 CE)
William Maginn (1794–1842)
Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006)
Bathsua Makin (1600–1675)

Thomas Malthus (1766–1834)
Mary Manning (1905–1999)
Hilary Mantel (1952–2022)
Chris Marker (1921–2012)
Constance Markievicz (1868–1927)
Edward Martyn (1859–1923)
David Masson (1822–1907)
Charles Robert Maturin (1782–1824)
Ali Mazrui (1933–2014)
Eimear McBride (1976–)
Tom McCarthy (1969–)
Peter McCullough (1965–)
Ian McEwan (1948–)
Pedro Mexía (1497–1551)
Alice Meynell (1847–1922)
China Miéville (1972–)
James Mill (1773–1836)
John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)
Karl Miller (1931–2014)
A.A. Milne (1882–1956)
Marion Milner (1900–1998)
John Milton (1608–1674)
Domenico Nani Mirabelli (c. 1455–after 1528)
David Mitchell (1969–)
Juliet Mitchell (1940–)
Mary Russell Mitford (1787–1855)
David Macbeth Moir (1798–1851)
Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800)
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762)
Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)
Edward Moore (1712–1757)
G.E. Moore (1873–1958)
George Moore (1852–1933)
Marianne Moore (1887–1972)
D.P. Moran (1869–1936)
John Morley (1838–1923)
Paul Morley (1957–)
Jan Morris (1926–2020)
William Morris (1834–1896)
Zarina Muhammad (1994–)
Iris Murdoch (1919–1999)
Dervla Murphy (1931–2022)
V.S. Naipaul (1932–2018)
Macvey Napier (1776–1847)
Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan (1988–)

Marchamont Nedham (1620–1678)
John Henry Newman (1801–1890)
Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1952–)
Kerri Ní Dochartaigh (1983–)
Doireann Ní Ghríofa (1981–)
Megan Nolan (1990–)
Flann O'Brien (Brian O'Nolan) (1911–1966)
Feargus O'Connor (1796–1855)
Andrew O'Hagan (1968–)
Redmond O'Hanlon (1947–)
Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897)
George Orwell (1903–1950)
Francis Osborne (1593–1659)
Robert Owen (1771–1858)
Amos Oz (1939–2018)
Thomas Paine (1737–1809)
Derek Parfit (1942–2017)
David Park (1953–)
John William Parker (1792–1870)
Walter Pater (1839–1894)
Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866)
Ian Penman (1959–)
Elizabeth Robins Pennell (1855–1936)
Thomas Percival (1740–1804)
Seamus Perry (1967–)
Adam Phillips (1954–)
Emilie Pine (1977–)
Plutarch (c. 46 CE–after 119 CE)
Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494)
Alexander Pope (1688–1744)
Ezra Pound (1885–1972)
Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)
Gabrielle de la Puente (1994–)
Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863–1944)
Jonathan Raban (1942–2023)
James Ralph (c. 1700–1762)
John Rawls (1921–2002)
Thomas Reid (1710–1796)
Ernest Renan (1823–1892)
Alexandre-Balthazar-Laurent Grimod de La Reynière (1758–1837)
Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)
Caelius Rhodiginus (1469–1525)
Jonathan Richardson (1667–1745)
Christopher Ricks (1933–)
Tim Robinson (1935–2020)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)
John Ruskin (1819–1900)
Bertrand Russell (1872–1970)
George Saintsbury (1845–1833)
John Mensah Sarbah (1864–1910)
John Scott (1784–1821)
Walter Scott (1771–1832)
Roger Scruton (1944–2020)
W.G. Sebald (1944–2001)
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009)
John Robert Seeley (1834–1895)
John Self (1959–)
Will Self (1961–)
Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE)
J.C. Shairp (1819–1885)
George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
Debora Shuger (1953–)
Walter Sickert (1860–1942)
Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900)
May Sinclair (1863–1946)
William Smellie (1740–1795)
John Smith (1952–)
Sydney Smith (1771–1845)
Zadie Smith (1975–)
Richard Smyth (1978–)
Tiyo Soga (1829–1871)
Susan Sontag (1933–2004)
Wole Soyinka (1934–)
Rachel Speght (1597–c. 1630)
Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)
Gayatri Spivak (1942–)
Jean Sprackland (1962–)
John Collings Squire (1884–1958)
Anthony Stafford (1587–1645)
Freya Stark (1893–1993)
Richard Steele (1672–1729)
George Steiner (1929–2020)
James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–1894)
Leslie Stephen (1832–1904)
Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)
Dugald Stewart (1753–1828)
Gilbert Stuart (1743–1786)
Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)
Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909)

John Addington Symonds (1840–1893)
J.M. Synge (1871–1909)
Rebecca Tamás (1988–)
Harriet Taylor (1807–1858)
William Temple (1628–1699)
William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863)
Paul Theroux (1941–)
Edward Thomas (1878–1917)
Perronet Thompson (1783–1869)
Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)
Bonnell Thornton (1725–1768)
Jean-Philippe Toussaint (1957–)
Anthony Trollope (1815–1882)
Thomas Tuke (1580–1657)
Daniel Tuvill (c. 1584–1660)
Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE)
Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540)
Ned Ward (1667–1731)
Marina Warner (1946–)
Joseph Warton (1722–1800)
H.G. Wells (1866–1946)
E.B. White (1899–1985)
Zoë Wicomb (1948–)
Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)
Bernard Williams (1929–2003)
Raymond Williams (1921–1988)
Mary-Kay Wilmers (1938–)
D.W. Winnicott (1896–1971)
Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951)
Peter Wollen (1938–2019)
Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)
Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)
Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855)
William Wordsworth (1770–1850)
W.B. Yeats (1865–1939)

Appendix 2
Chronological List of Essayists

Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE)
Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE)
Plutarch (c. 46 CE–after 119 CE)
Aulus Gellius (125 CE–180 CE)
Macrobius (370–430 CE)
Philippe de Commines (1447–1511)
Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494)
Domenico Nani Mirabelli (c. 1455–after 1528)
Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)
Caelius Rhodiginus (1469–1525)
Jacques Hurault (1480–1546)
Paolo Giovio (1483–1552)
Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540)
Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540)
Martin du Bellay (1495–1559)
Pedro Mexía (1497–1551)
Conrad Gessner (1516–1565)
Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)
Nicholas Breton (c. 1545/53–c. 1625/6)
Haly Heron (c. 1550–1591)
Francis Bacon (1561–1626)
James Charles Stuart, James VI and I (1566–1625)
Richard Haydocke (1569–1642)
John Donne (1572–1631)
Joseph Hall (1574–1656)
Robert Burton (1577–1640)
William Cornwallis (c. 1579–1614)
Thomas Tuke (1580–1657)
Daniel Tuvill (c. 1584–1660)
Robert Johnson (1586–1626)
Anthony Stafford (1587–1645)
Richard Brathwait (1588–1673)
Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)
Joshua Baildon (c. 1592–1660s)

William Cavendish (1593–1676)
Francis Osborne (1593–1659)
Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)
René Descartes (1596–1650)
Rachel Speght (1597–c. 1630)
Richard Flecknoe (c. 1600–1678)
Bathsua Makin (1600–1675)
T.C. Esquire (1602–1652)
Owen Felltham (1602–1668)
Thomas Browne (1605–1682)
John Milton (1608–1674)
Roger L'Estrange (1616–1704)
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Richard Jackson (1621–1677)
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John Hall (1627–1656)
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John Dryden (1631–1700)
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Bonnell Thornton (1725–1768)
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Hilary Mantel (1952–2022)
Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill (1952–)
John Smith (1952–)
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Debora Shuger (1953–)
Bill Buford (1954–)
Adam Phillips (1954–)
Mary Beard (1955–)
Chris Kraus (1955–)
Peter Mack (1955–)
Rita Felski (1956–)
John Akomfrah (1957–)
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Ian Penman (1959–)
John Self (1959–)
Will Self (1961–)
Amit Chaudhuri (1962–)
Anne Enright (1962–)
Kathleen Jamie (1962–)
John Lanchester (1962–)
Jean Sprackland (1962–)
Marian Keyes (1963–)

Rosinka Chaudhuri (1965–)
William Dalrymple (1965–)
Peter McCullough (1965–)
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Sarah Hall (1974–)
Teju Cole (1975–)
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Zadie Smith (1975–)
Sheila Heti (1976–)
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Elisa Gabbert (1979–)
Ben Lerner (1979–)
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